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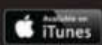


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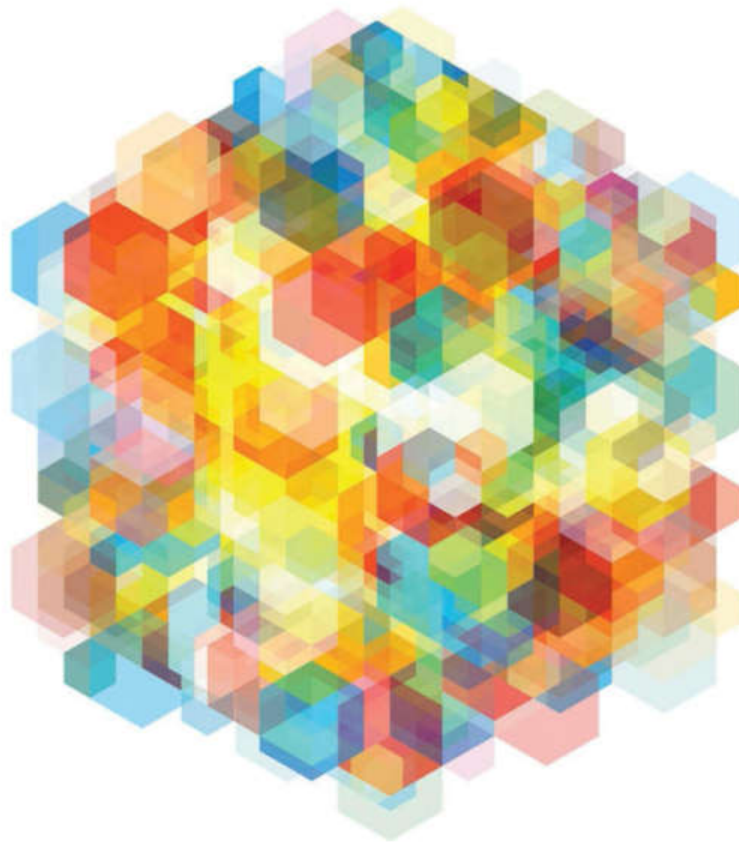


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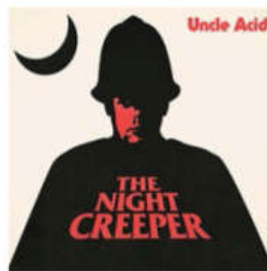
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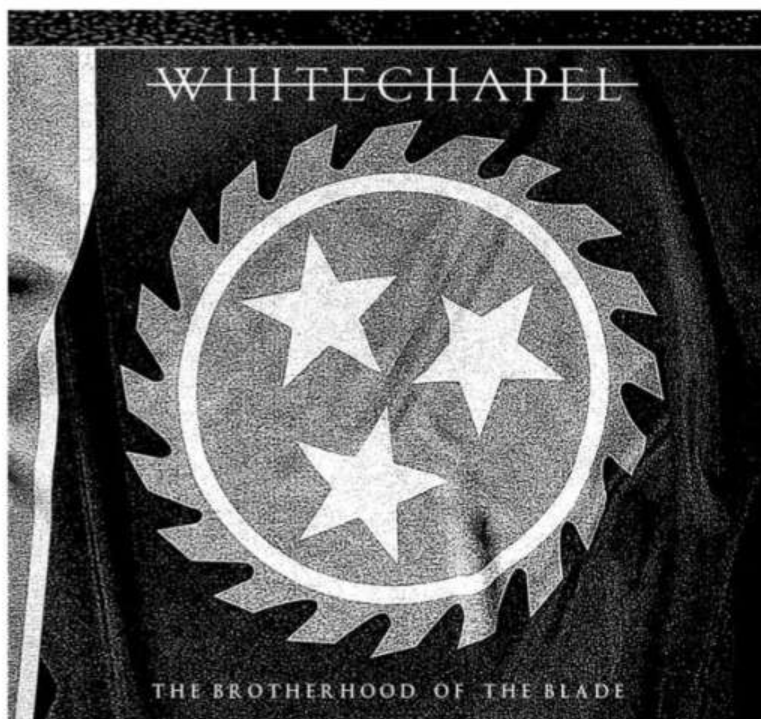
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Twitching Tongues

DISHARMONY

Dramatically building upon the foundations of 2013's In Love There Is No Law, the LA-based quintet are back with a new full-length album, DISHARMONY, which sees the band channeling a variety of hardcore and metal influences adding to their unique sound that is both esoteric and resists lazy classification.

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NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTION: Curtis Circulation (201)634-7400

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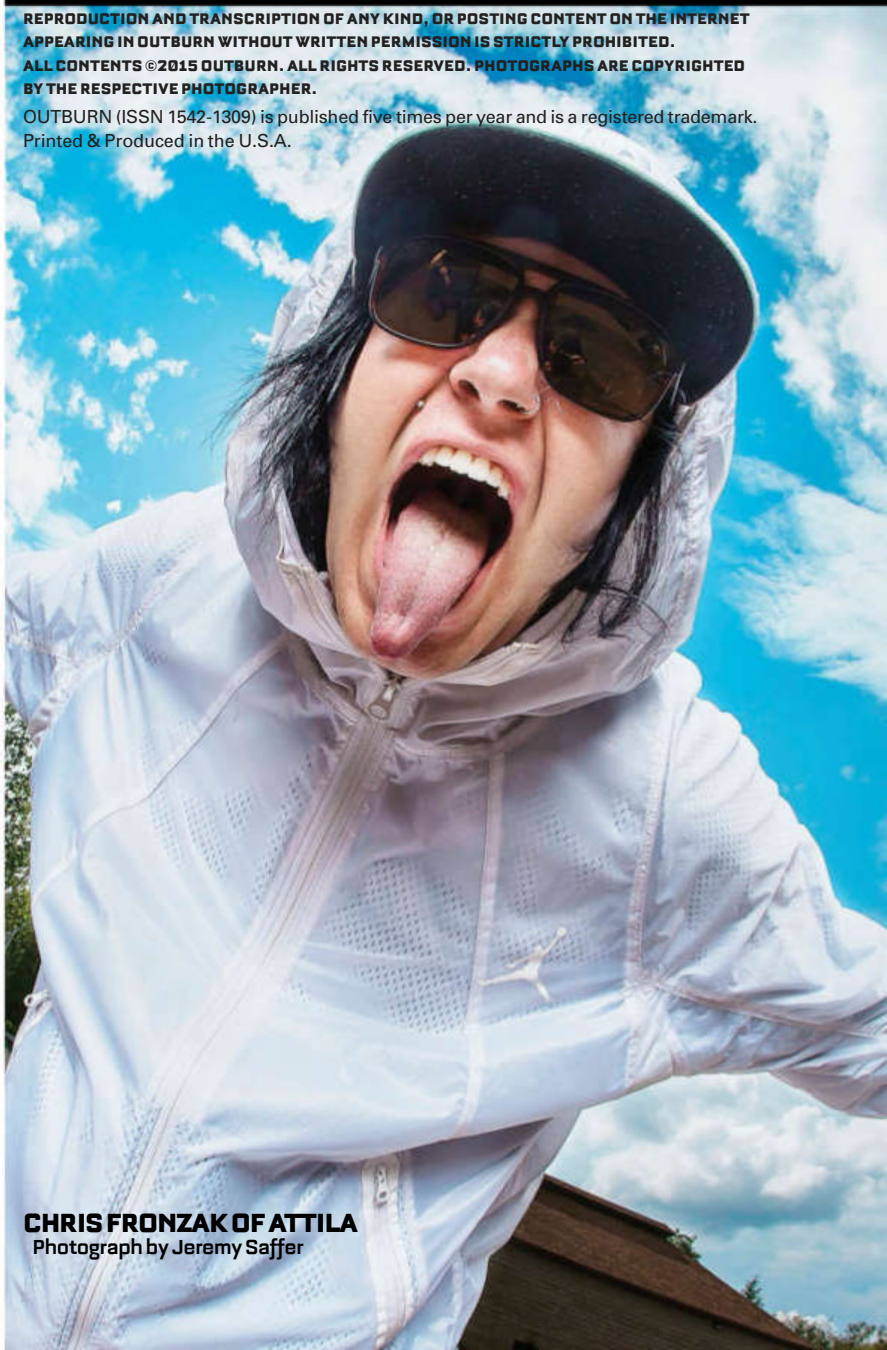
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CHRIS FRONZAK OF ATTILA
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RUTH MEJEBBER

SHOTFIRE

"You don't play music for 13 years without going through some bullshit," declares Philly Byrne, vocalist for **GAMA BOMB**, as the band readies its fifth album, *Untouchable Glory*. "Before we made our last album [2013's *The Terror Tapes*], we ran into nearly every kind of trouble: losing an original member, injury and surgery, a fight for the band's soul with our old record label. It was just a trial run for *Untouchable Glory*. This record is Gama Bomb in full flight. We deliberately wrote massive choruses, catchy hooks, and arrangements designed to make you want to bang your fists. Right now metal as a genre expects its fans to settle for less. We're all so busy being slaves to the bullshit rules of our subgenres we're forgetting to be interesting and cool. That's why *Untouchable Glory* is such an important album for us. It's shamelessly fun and catchy. We refuse to take ourselves seriously. Metal needs more albums like this. If you're open-minded, like heavy metal and movies where people get punched in the head, this album is for you."



LUKAS LANCICKO

Black metal quartet **ERIMHA** returns with its second release for Victory Records, *Thesis Ov Warfare*. "We've always seen life as a war, and the writing process of *Thesis Ov Warfare* was not an exemption," explains drummer Ksaos. "The title is clearly an analysis on how to handle your pain and keep on fighting towards your goals, so you can finally see beyond your preset boundaries and reach a new level of freedom. We are losing a lot of human rights and are slowly reduced as robot slaves. Government controls everything we want to do, and they act like if this earth is not to the people anymore, but a property they control. If no one stands up and unites together, we won't even be able to fight before we realize we lost everything."

Napalm Records has announced the signing of **PHANTASMA**, the new symphonic rock group of Charlotte Wessels (Delain), Georg Neuhauser (Serenity), and Oliver Philipps (Everon). Phantasma was born from vocalist Neuhauser's longstanding ambition to create a story driven concept record. Wessels not only lent her voice to Phantasma but also her debut novella *The Deviant Hearts*, which was written especially for the project and is also the title of the album. Noted guests include Tom Englund, Chloe Lowery, and Dennis Schunke. Neuhauser declares, "We have truly enjoyed giving a shape, face, and sound to *The Deviant Hearts*. It was an inspiring and exciting process, and we can not wait to share the result of our efforts with you through the release with Napalm."



FABIO INTERRA



AMY BUCK

Columbus, Ohio's **LIKE MOTHS TO FLAMES** is releasing their third full-length album, *The Dying Things We Live For*. "I have always enjoyed writing from a personal spot. From things like losing family, growing up, and battling religion," says vocalist Chris Roetter. "It's important to open yourself up to the listener so they can find something to truly connect with. I wanted the album to show growth, from all angles. It's an album that captures the sound we've been chasing after. The member changes we'd gone through over the last year gave us an opportunity to reinvent the band. This time around we could really sit down as a group and tackle the writing process, which gave us the chance to showcase what we were all capable of as musicians. It has been hard for us to keep the album to ourselves. We are very excited to share it with our fans."



TESSERACT

Interview with Daniel Tompkins by Dan Slessor

Photograph by Tom Barnes

"WE REALIZED THAT A LOT OF THE SONGS TOUCH ON THE SUBJECT OF TRUTH."

IT'S BEEN AN EVENTFUL FEW YEARS for Tesseract, one of the UK's prime modern progressive bands. Following the departure of vocalist Daniel Tompkins in 2011, they moved forward first with Elliot Coleman, and then with Ashe O'Hara, whose graceful vocals made 2013's critically acclaimed *Altered State* Tesseract's most engaging and ambitious release to date. However, in 2014 O'Hara left the ranks and Tompkins rejoined, and returning with the mighty *Polaris*, the band once again displays a marked evolution in its sound, unwilling to keep rehashing the same ideas. Tompkins gives us an insider's perspective to these goings on.

What was the reason behind your departure from the band in 2011?

It can be a real struggle trying to make a living and survive off music. I have a wife, baby, mortgage, and all the financial responsibilities that come with that, and going off on tour for a few weeks in America and coming back with a couple of hundred quid is problematic. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to carry on making music, but it was a lifestyle issue, and I stayed quite close with all of the guys. Now, I've managed to find a way to make a living. I'm a vocal coach, which I really enjoy doing, and it pays the bills. When things were not working out for the band with Ashe, I was subsequently in a better position, I could come back and

commit to it, and we're all in it for the long run at this point.

Was it strange for you to hear the music the band put out without you?

It was painful. Obviously, it was amazing stuff, and we actually had demos of me singing on a lot of the songs they put out. So having not wanting to leave in the first place and to then hear those, and how good they were, really gnawed at me. It was great for the guys, though. They toured relentlessly on it, and I never would have survived that anyway.

Going into this new record, was there a plan for it?

I don't think we knew what to expect. It was a natural process and we didn't force it, but at the same time it was another stepping stone. The band had moved on with a different singer and evolved that way. Then it was a case of reintegrating my voice, my lyrics, and my style into what they'd become. And I'm a different singer to when I left, too, because I've evolved. I don't scream as much anymore, I like to use my voice more in a singing context, and my songwriting has gotten a lot more melodic.

How would you describe the sound of *Polaris*?

A mixed bag. With the guitars in particular, you'll notice a huge change, less chuggy and less djent, and a little more prog rock, and rather than going for a big sweeping soundscape concept album, this is more of

an album of solid, individual songs. They've all got different characteristics. It still has that Tesseract sound, but there's a lot of different styles infused into it. The rhythmic patterns in a lot of the vocal melodies are very upbeat and active, but there's still that ethereal, layered, choral vibe on it. The songs are also a lot shorter. I think we tried to get to the point a bit quicker, more succinctly, and just really focus in on the core of what makes up the song.

Where are you coming from lyrically?

A variety of places. I've always been a very literal lyricist, but I've tried to be a little more poetic this time around. There are some songs that have quite personal meanings to us as a band, addressing our personal struggles when it comes to having to be away from our families. I'm not very political, but I'm very observational, and if I see something that affects me on a personal level, I tend to write about it, but I don't try to force anything.

Is there an overriding theme?

I think so. Me and Amos [Williams, bass] talked about this quite a lot, and though I write all the lyrics about what I want, he can then look at things and maybe see something that unites them. With this, we came to a point where we realized that a lot of the songs touch on the subject of truth. He said something along the lines of, "What we know today to be true is more often than not found out to be false in the future." In

terms of science, modern medicine, and things like that, theories change all the time, but right now we believe what we know about these things to be true, and this leads into a theme that is more about the transient nature of truth.

Where is the title, *Polaris*, drawn from?

That was Amos again. Polaris, I believe, is a name for the North Star, and centuries from now what we believe to be the North Star will change and be a different star, though it has always been a pivotal part of existence on Earth. It's been used for centuries by people to find their way, and using the title is his poetic way of commenting on how things change.

Do you think you might opt to go the concept album route for the next record?

Yeah, I do. That said, it's been nice to experiment and reinvestigate the sounds that we have created together, which has given us the mixed bag of songs we have this time around. It's still cohesive. The songs make sense together, but I think we'll pull more back in that direction, and that's exciting to me. I feel like I needed to get this part of the process out of the way, to put my own stamp back on the songs and experiment with my new voice. And now having a record we're all proud of, we're all looking forward to where we go next.

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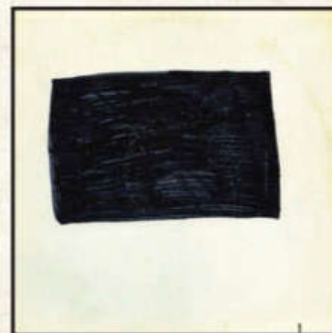
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PYOGENESIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN a cult band in the States, yet this defiantly indefinable German band has enjoyed a significantly higher profile over in Europe. Founding member and songwriter Flo V. Schwarz has maintained Pyogenesis as a musical entity that refuses to compromise, having creatively leapfrogged to such diametrically opposed genres as doom/death, indie rock, goth, and pop punk over the course of a six album career. Their latest, *A Century in the Curse of Time*, brings Pyogenesis full circle, as the album represents a return to form—a thick and heavy sound with a sprawling lyrical concept of industrial and cultural revolution during the 19th Century. Is it steampunk metal? Perhaps. Either way, Pyogenesis is back, and Flo V. Schwarz is ready to talk about it.

What made you decide to reconnect with the heavier sound of the band?

I think that if you become a real metal fan as a teenager, then you will remain a metal fan all your life, even if you indulge into other genres. Your art will always be connected to metal. I go to the Wacken Open Air metal festival in Germany every year, and I see four generations of fans. It's nothing you see anywhere else, and no one thinks any different of it, either. No one looks at anyone else like they are aliens, and you don't see that in punk, hip-hop, techno, or anything else. I became a metal fan as a teenager, so even though I've written other music as well, my heart always beats for metal. So, it was a very obvious thing for me to return to those roots.

A Century in the Curse of Time is the heaviest Pyogenesis has been in some time, but it doesn't sound like the older albums. Was it a goal for you to be both heavy and original? It wasn't the goal, but it obviously happened. I don't write music with a certain view in mind of how I want it to sound,

but instead try to focus on how I'm feeling. So, this album is a reflection of where I was when I wrote those songs. The trademarks of Pyogenesis are all included, such as the melody and melancholy, which makes it very unique when combined with the heaviness of the songs.

Do you still write the same way, or has your approach changed over time?

The approach is the same, but I took much more time. Previously, we ran straight into the studio after writing the songs, but now I have my own studio, so I can work on the tiny things, week by week and month by month, until I'm satisfied 100 percent. This differs a lot in having to deliver a master to the record label by a certain time.

Given that this album is your first in over a decade, how far back do some of these ideas go?

The oldest song is 14 years old, actually, which is "Lifeless," the first video clip. The rest of the songs are around three years old or so, and when I started writing them, it wasn't clear at first whether or not they were going to be used for Pyogenesis. The thought was always in the back of my mind, though.

"Lifeless" is the dooziest song on the record. Was it clear right away that it was going to be singled out for a video?

No, actually. We had to decide after the record was done, and it was super difficult for me, because I love all of them. I asked the band, friends, our label and crew what they thought, but the decision process was tough.

With six albums being wildly across the board in style, does that become a challenge when playing live?

It depends on what sort of show we're playing. If we're playing Wacken or some other metal festival, then we'll play our heavier songs, but if it's more of a mainstream or varied gig—something like Rock am Ring, for example—then we'll mix in songs from the later records.

Do you feel that Pyogenesis fans are loyal and have grown with the band album to album, or do you think that some might only like the first EP or *Twinaleblood*?

It's both, actually. There are a lot of fans that have all the records, and we'll see them when we do signing sessions. They'll bring sleeves from every single one of our releases, from first to last. When we're releasing a new record, we hear lots of comments discussing how they think it might sound, and there are always people who only like one specific era of Pyogenesis. Then again, there are also those fans that have stuck with us and are confident that every new album will be good based on our track record. That gives me a certain level of satisfaction, knowing that people enjoy what we write regardless of the style.

What made you want to write lyrics about these historical themes?

I've been into 19th century European history for quite some time. I think it's the most interesting of all, and it possessed the biggest changes. Sure, we have the internet, computers, and smartphones over the last years, but I don't think that these changes are as big as those in the 19th Century, and how it affected simply working for a living and for so many people. Nations were winning wars in Europe due to having a train transit system, and the first visions of science fiction presented in books like *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* captured imaginations around the world. I'm just fascinated by the cultural shifts in the 19th century. It was clear to me after writing some songs for this record that *A Century in the Curse of Time* could end up being a concept album, and it wasn't long before it all came together.

PYOGENESIS

Interview with Flo V. Schwarz by George Pacheco

Photograph by Peter Tokay

"MY HEART ALWAYS BEATS FOR METAL."



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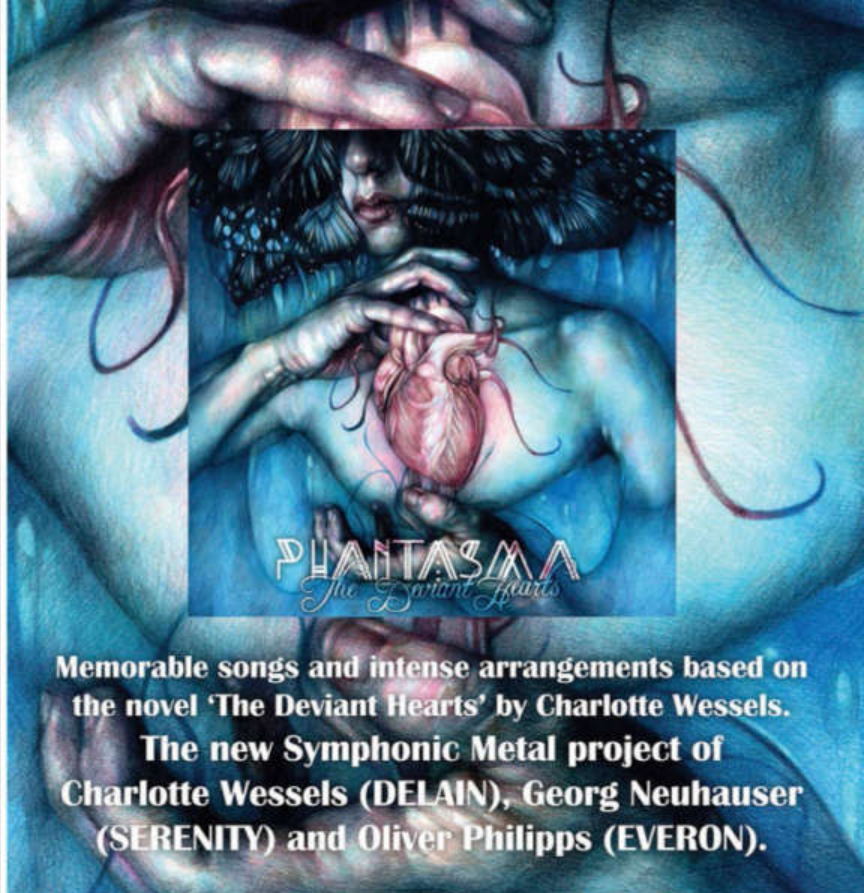
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HUNTRESS

Interview with Jill Janus by Kelley Simms
Photograph by Neil Zlozower

"WE'RE ABSOLUTELY A MODERN METAL BAND, BUT WE NEVER FORGET WHERE WE CAME FROM."

SELF-PROFESSED WHITE WITCH JILL JANUS has been to dark places throughout her life. As her band Huntress readies its third full-length effort, *Static*, Janus has come to terms with treating her mental illness and overcoming a recent hysterectomy after cancer was detected, which sidelined the Los Angeles based group from its normal touring regiment. Now fully recovered and with a new album, Huntress is ready to impress the heavy metal masses and destroy stages across the nation. Janus discusses *Static*, her affection for the occult, and why she recommends exercise and sobriety.

You recently opened up about your mental illness. Is this topic expressed in songs such as "Mania" on *Static*? Is the songwriting process a cathartic experience?

It keeps me out of jail! (laughs) With this record, it absolutely does reveal much more lyrically about my mental illness. The song "Mania" is about my struggle with bipolar mania. I have this driving force, but at the same time it can be dangerous for those around me and to myself. The only way to really conquer it is through medication and being honest with fans and the public. I want people to listen to this album and know that there's much more depth to it, and people can probably relate to that as well.

Through medication, how soon did you notice stability in your personality?

It took me 20 years to feel this stable. There's a lot of advancements with medication now that we didn't have years ago. I would recommend exercise and staying sober, if possible, because drinking really targets the anxiety. For me, it's been a lifestyle change as well. I work with a naturopathic doctor, so we designed a plan to make sure my health is good and my diet is good. Some people struggle with anxiety, and they don't realize that working out every day would keep that away.

You also recently had a hysterectomy. How are you feeling physically?

This was the first summer that we haven't been touring. Obviously, the biggest reason was because I had to have surgery. Cancer was detected on my uterus, and I'm now cancer-free and recovering. There's been times where it's been really brutal, but I feel stronger. I feel like more of a powerhouse than ever before. I'm ready to get back on the road and destroy some faces.

You grew up with old-school influences such as King Diamond and Rob Halford, yet Huntress' sound is modern and fresh. How do you achieve this balance?

You just have to remember that we're attached to the roots of heavy metal, but we're not a throwback band. We're absolutely a modern metal band, but we never forget where we come from. A lot of that is on the new album—the early 70s proto metal bands. Serious men have really influenced me vocally over the years, and I try to emulate it. Fortunately, I have a lot of idols to look up to as far as vocalists are concerned.

"Brian" has an eerie vibe. What's that song about?

This song is kind of far out. There is a Brian; there's definitely a Brian. Brian found me in a strange, weird, psychic way. I have a job as a nurse during the day when I'm in town, and I work for naturopathic doctors. Brian was a patient, and he would come in and bring me all these crystals and stones. We were able to have this really strange, psychic connection. He's like an old, weird wizard, and I was really attached to this guy. I just thought it'd be a cool song about him.

As the frontwoman, you obviously receive most of the attention, but what did each member of the band bring to the new album?

Blake Meahl has been Huntress' guitarist from the very beginning. Eli Santana [guitar] joined forces with us, as well as Tyler Meahl, who is Blake's little brother, on drums. We kind of merged. Holy Grail is Tyler and Eli's other band. They were in between recording cycles, and we decided to go on tour and see how it worked. Most of this album was written before they came in, but they contributed to a couple of awesome tracks. It's a wonderful lineup, and we're really grateful to have Eli and Tyler in on this. Of course, me and Blake are in it for the long haul.

Is your affection for the occult and witchcraft still present on *Static*, and are there any songs that deal with this subject matter?

Actually, all of them do. That's just the way it is and always has been. I'm very close to certain aspects of the occult. On the record, fans who know, there's certain key words and little things I hide in between the songs, especially numerology. If you add up all three albums, you'll find a secret message from me.

Once again, the cover artwork was created by Vance Kelly. Did you give him any kind of direction?

Vance and I have an interesting and telepathic connection. I told him about the song "Static" and that it was going to be the name of the album. I told him the premise of it and the lyrical content. He sent a sketch back right away, and it just felt right. It's a mixture between the *Static Monster*, which references a song, and I like to put characters into every album we do.

With a new album and a lot of touring, what do you hope to accomplish next?

I want to have longevity. I want to be doing this for a really long time. You need to focus on one thing and one thing only, and that's Huntress. And so far it's been working out really well.

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WITH THEIR THIRD ALBUM, *Disharmony*, Twitching Tongues has crafted a heavy as hell collection consisting of everything from doom metal to hardcore. The Los Angeles based band isn't quite so easy to pigeonhole as some of their peers, but make no mistake, whatever you call them, the songs that make up *Disharmony* are as harsh and punishing as it gets. Vocalist Colin Young opens up on the evolution of Twitching Tongues over the course of three albums, his love of film scores, and more.

Which track do you think is the heaviest on *Disharmony*?

Whoa, that's a good question. Heaviest track? The opening title track, "Disharmony," is just heavy part after heavy part after heavy part. There's that one, but I feel like the end of the last two songs, "The End of Love" and "Cruci-Fiction," use two of my favorite heavy parts that we've ever written. The most aggressive song is "Cannibal." It's just a straight-up fast hardcore song, which we've never really done.

The opening track, "Disharmony," is very cinematic. Are you influenced at all by actual film scores?

It's funny that you ask that, because John Williams scores and stuff like that are always something that me and my brother [Taylor Young, guitar/vocals] love. We listen to those things for fun all the time. So yeah, that might have subconsciously played a part in how the synth parts turned out. I just wanted them to be as grand as possible.

"Cruci-fiction" is a huge eight minute epic. Did you set out to write it that way, or did it grow into that organically?

That was the goal right off the bat. We had to top the closer from the last record ["Frigid," off of 2013's *In Love There Is No Law*] and be adventurous and do things we hadn't done yet—this big, melodic intro into these super heavy verses into a melodic chorus into this crazy melodic bridge. The ending part of that song is just the coolest thing that we've ever written. I love it.

Are there any lyrical themes that you wanted to explore specifically on the album?

There is a lot of personal things on there. The title track is about our journey in music thus far. There are three songs about my failed relationships. A couple of songs are kind of lyrical successors to previous songs of ours.

"Asylum Avenue" is a lyrical sequel to our song "Preacher Man," and the song "Arrival" is a direct successor to the song "Departure" from the last record.

"Arrival" is such a unique track on *Disharmony*, with how pulled back and electronically influenced it is.

With that song, where "Departure" was a literal departure in the sound on the last record, we wanted to have a similar experience without doing the same thing. Before it was this acoustic song that builds and builds, and this time around, we decided to do a Depeche Mode, lighter, like Godflesh thing. I'm really happy with the outcome.

Do you approach a song like that differently in terms of the writing or structuring of it?

Yeah, because structurally there's not as much happening, even though, while most people won't be able to tell, with a song like that, I'll let the music breathe and try not to hold onto each word of the verse. It's not so cluttered, and so every single thing I say stands out a little more. Because it's so weird and much more different than every other song, you have no choice but to do it a little differently. Even if it's just subconsciously, you aren't writing the same kind of song, so you have to do a different thing.

What's fascinating, and what seems to be important to you, is the band being eclectic enough to evade simple classification.

Yeah, I wouldn't necessarily say it's very important, but it's just unavoidable. We have all the ethics of a hardcore band while playing these really metallic songs. I think whatever anybody feels comfortable calling us, it's fine by me. To me, we'll always just be a hardcore band. There were times writing the previous record where we'd have a part and be like, "No, this might be too much or too crazy," in terms of how heavy something is or vocally a big part. And this time, we just went with our instincts. If we did something and we liked it, we were going to go with it instead of second-guessing ourselves. And the outcome is something that we're very proud of.

This is your first album on Metal Blade. How did that relationship come about with the record label?

Our friend Andy Buckley, who plays guitar in Every Time I Die, was in the ear of Brian Slagel of Metal Blade constantly about us. And I think one day, Brian was just like, "Yeah, I'll sign them." There's a lot more that goes into it, but when it finally got to presenting us to the rest of the label, everybody was on board. We had met with a couple other labels at the time, but every single person in the Metal Blade office got up to meet us and sit with us and talk. It felt like a great home right away.

How do you think the band has evolved from your first album until now? We've done away with the blues scale entirely, which was a conscious effort this time around. I'm happier with that. There's nothing that can be confused as rock stuff. Instead, it's just a really fucking heavy record. That was the goal—more extreme, but somehow catchier. And I think we achieved that. It feels really good.

Interview with Colin Young by Tyler Davidson
Photograph by Vince Edwards

"WE HAVE ALL THE ETHICS OF A HARDCORE BAND WHILE PLAYING THESE REALLY METALLIC SONGS."

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FEAR FACTORY

Interview with Burton C. Bell by George Pacheco
Photograph by Stephanie Cabral

"EVERYTHING IS A CHALLENGE, AND IT DRIVES US. IT HAS TO BE BETTER THAN THE LAST."

FEAR FACTORY HAS BROUGHT its A game on *Genexus*, the band's 10th full-length album since first revolutionizing modern metal in the early 90s. There's no band that quite sounds like Fear Factory, a California based institution that has combined industrial, goth, and extreme metal impeccably over the years, inspiring such diverse acts as Strapping Young Lad and Soilwork. *Genexus* is the third album since vocalist Burton C. Bell reconnected with founding Fear Factory axeman Dino Cazares and represents a hat trick of mechanical, menacing modern metal with a stirring sense of emotional dynamics. Bell's iconic scream/sing attack has rarely sounded more vital and impassioned, so naturally we were excited to speak with him on one sunny afternoon to talk all things Fear Factory.

These last three albums since reconnecting with Dino Cazares have been excellent. How do you compare this run of records to the early success of *Soul of a New Machine* and *Demanufacture*?

With Dino coming back to the band, it felt almost like a regrouping, a regeneration of the band, and therefore it felt like a new beginning. We were without a solid label, starting from scratch again. Compared to the early days, now you know what to do when you restart. We were mature enough to take the right steps to find exactly the sound we wanted and how to achieve it. We knew what we were doing this time rather than winging it. But at the same time, we were winging it when we created *Demanufacture*, which sort of set the bar for us. We don't want to write *Demanufacture* every time, but we're trying to have that caliber of time. The last record was kind of rushed, but we took our time for *Genexus*, and it really came out the way we wanted, by having the quality of songcraft and the energy it requires. We were able to capture it.

Do you find there's a split between fans that are getting into the band now and those that have been around for the evolution of Fear Factory?

The people who have seen that evolution have an opinion based in history. They've seen what we've done. They've seen our peaks and valleys. They know the journey of Fear Factory, whereas the new fans that have just discovered *Demanufacture* three years ago have an excitement and enthusiasm that is a lot different than a longtime fan. The new fans are the ones in the pit, whereas the older generation is out there on the edges, pushing the younger ones in! Everyone's still excited about it, though. The older fans are pleased we're still going strong, and I hope they're into this new record, as well.

Did you think back in the day that you would have a career with, as you said, peaks and valleys, and that Fear Factory would burn bright and burn out intensely?

(laughs) Honestly, my thought in the very beginning was, "This will last 10 years." It just kept going and going, though, and 10 years on, we were touring for *Obsolete*, which was one of our biggest records. I never thought I'd have this length of a career with Fear Factory. I never thought I'd be on this journey.

How long did it take to write *Genexus*? Did any ideas pop up while you were touring?

We really started writing after touring. This record was started in February of 2014. We were writing and recording at the same time, changing things up to see how they worked. We were trying out different arrangements, and it just kept going and going. It was a slow, brick and mortar kind of thing to build up.

How much of a challenge is it to keep pushing the envelope in regards to keeping those arrangements fresh and building upon the Fear Factory sound?

It's definitely a challenge, but that's what really drives us.

We always set the bar high for ourselves, so the challenge is not only to come up with good songs, arrangements, vocals, and lyrics, but also to challenge us to blend in that experimentation without losing our identity. If you can bring in something new and move forward with it as an enhancement, then that makes everything better. Where are we going to take the concept? How is it going to sound? Everything is a challenge, and it drives us. It has to be better than the last.

The themes that you often cover—technology, man vs. machine, the idea of a soul within a machine—was that something you always wanted to cover as a lyricist?

That's the way it comes out. The cool thing about it is that I tend to write from a first person perspective, and that makes it easy to develop them further. When I write about the soul or emotions, it's coming from a real place in my personality. That's where the soul comes into the machine. I was always into sci-fi growing up, even before *Star Wars*, and to me the real interesting things were the robots and androids and how human they seemed. Being able to put these concepts to lyrics has been a challenge, but definitely cool.

Your mixing of harsh and clean vocals was groundbreaking in the 90s. Did bringing in your influences from Killing Joke, U2, and Fields of the Nephilim help identify Fear Factory early on?

Absolutely. It was my influences with Dino's influences and Raymond's [Herrera, drums] influences that created the Fear Factory sound. Raymond was into full-on death metal and hardcore. Dino was into grindcore, metal, and some goth, but I was the one who came in and brought in the post-punk and industrial vibe into it. That's my tribute to my influences. When anyone asks me how I come up with melodies, it's just me emulating my favorite singers, and by accident I came across a style of my own.

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BLESSTHEFALL FRONTMAN Beau Bokan is one in a million. Since taking over as frontman for the metalcore band in 2008, Bokan has remained as vigorously enthusiastic, pleasant, and upbeat as he's ever been despite the spirit crushing side effects of becoming a rock star. And one can hardly blame him. The Arizona based metallers, including guitarists Eric Lambert and Elliott Gruenberg, bassist Jared Warth, and drummer Matt Traynor, continue to enjoy a string of punishing, commercially verdant releases. 2013's *Hollow Bodies* cracked well into the top 20, and this fall sees the release of *To Those Left Behind*, the band's fifth and most ambitious outing yet. We caught up with Bokan on a sunny Southern California morning, where we find him in typically high spirits and with loads of fresh insights on the new record.

Tell us about the title of the new record, *To Those Left Behind*.

The record isn't a concept record, but it does have a common theme throughout the material. It's a cool story about love, loss, revenge, and betrayal. In the story, somebody gets killed, and they come back as a ghost and haunt their enemies, but they also try to reconnect with their loved ones. *To Those Left Behind* is for the people that the character in the story left behind. The reason it's not a concept album is because there are songs on there that don't necessarily have to do with the exact concept. It's more of a themed record, and it's awesome. From front to back, we really scrutinized the track listing. I know that these days kids just buy singles, but we really wanted to create something for them to listen to as a whole album where they can be taken on a journey with peaks, valleys, and everything else. We really stepped our game up for this one. **The phrase "left behind" has some heavy connotations among Christians. Plus, there's the HBO series called *The Leftovers*. Any connection between that show and the album?**

That's funny you mention that! My wife and I started watching that show together, but we didn't get to finish it because I had to go on tour. But I think that subconsciously, it might be related. I'm influenced by any movie I watch or anything that's going on around me. So, probably, yes, now that

you mention it. I wouldn't have thought about that, but since you brought it up, it makes sense because we were watching that show and the idea might have been planted in my head.

What differences will we hear between the new record and *Hollow Bodies*?

On the new album, we tried something we'd never done before. We wanted to try to step outside the box and work with somebody else with our ideas. So, we approached a couple of co-writers, and the one we stuck with was Erik Ron [producer]. He was such an awesome dude. He really understood what we were doing, and he wasn't one of those people looking to get all the rights to the music, get the biggest percentage, and use all his ideas. Erik was like, "You guys are writers. I'm a writer, so let's collaborate." It was an awesome collaboration. We were able to come up with these insane melodies that I couldn't have come up with on my own, or that would have taken me a lot longer to write. The biggest step up is the melodies and lyrics. They're at a whole new level, and I'm really excited to hear what people think. We've got a couple songs out already, and we're getting some really good reactions so far. I pushed myself to try new things, whether it's singing higher notes or lower notes or different melodies in general that you wouldn't normally hear from me, and it's cool that kids are seeing that this isn't the same thing that we've released in the past.

What was the biggest struggle facing the band during the writing process?

Not settling. We wrote the most songs that we ever have for any album. We had six or seven songs that we scrapped, which never happens with us. Maybe we have one extra song that doesn't make the record, but the new album was very heavily scrutinized. We thought that *Hollow Bodies* was one of our best records, so we knew that we had to come out swinging. This record had to be cool and different. The guitar work has come a long way. Eric and Elliott have become so good at their craft. We have some really poppy songs, like "Hey Baby, Here's That Song You Wanted" and "40 Days." We loved having a few of those on the record, not because the label said, "Hey, we need a radio song," but because we love those kind of songs. So, you'll hear a couple of those,

some really cool, somber slow tracks, and, of course, the intense metal songs that we like to write, too. You get a mixed bag with the whole thing, and it's all very honest.

So, you're a fan of horror movies?

We all like really bad horror films. When we're together we just go on iTunes and we'll find a really popular one, but then we'll look at related ones and watch whatever's up there. *It Follows* was one of my favorites from last year. It was just so cool. Sometimes we'll take stuff like that and integrate it into our songwriting.

What's the scariest film you've seen lately?

Have you seen *Ex Machina*? Okay, so it's a thriller, not a horror flick, but it's scary to me because it seems like something that could actually happen. It's more of a psychological thriller, so my head was kind of fucked after watching it (laughs). Afterwards I was thinking, "Wait a minute, this dude's in love with a robot!" It does a really good job of making you feel a certain way, and in the end thinking, "Wait, that's completely wrong!"

Would you ever want to be in the movies?

Oh, I'd love our band to be in a movie. We'd have so much fun.

Mastodon was in *Game of Thrones*, so what do you think would be the best vehicle for blessthefall to make its acting debut?

I'll have to say *The Walking Dead*, and no, I don't want to be a zombie. I want to be a badass! I want to be the new guy who comes in and everybody's like, "Who the hell is this handsome young devil?" Maybe I'd have some really sweet military gun with a silencer on it, like I'd be a sniper, just taking people out, and with the silencer, the zombies wouldn't hear me shooting. Michonne has the samurai sword, Daryl has his crossbow, Rick has his six-shooter, so maybe I'm like a SEAL guy and all the girls are huddling around me, Daryl's a little jealous. I'm going to pitch it to *The Walking Dead* peeps and see if I can get them on board (laughs).

How about some either/or questions and explain your choices. Led Zeppelin or Metallica?

Metallica, because when I used to only listen to hip-hop and gangsta rap, my best friend was trying to get me into rock 'n' roll so hard, and Metallica was the band that did it for me. Metallica was the band that he shoved down my throat—*Kill 'Em All*, ...*And Justice for All*, and the *Black Album*.

That's what finally got me into rock.

Friday the 13th or Halloween?

Oh, man, really? That's crazy. That's like picking between your children. Fuck, dude... (long pause) Who's got the cooler mask? It comes down to that. They both have amazing masks, they're both total badasses. I don't know which one to pick, but I'm going to go with *Halloween*. Rob Zombie re-did *Halloween*, and I don't really like Rob Zombie flicks, but he did a good job with that one.

You're not going to like the next question then. Rob Zombie or Marilyn Manson?

Marilyn Manson because I don't like Rob Zombie (laughs). No hate on him! It's just that his movies are bad, but not bad in a good way. Just my personal taste. Sorry, Rob. I hope he doesn't read this.

Playing sports or relaxing?

Sports, because I'm a huge hockey fan. I grew up playing hockey and basketball, and even when I'm home from touring, I'll go play hockey or basketball. I'll always pick sports over relaxation.

Finally, massive arena show or super intimate, high energy club show?

I have to take the club show just because that's where we come from as a band. We've done those tours for years, and there's something about being around so many sweaty people just losing their minds. We get more gratification from that than walking into a stale arena and everybody's standing there watching you from a hundred yards away. I wouldn't mind playing arenas, of course, but I'd have to say that the payback from club shows is unmatched.

What's next now that the new album is out?

We're doing a run through the secondary markets in October and November, just to get the word out. We're hitting the road with Stick to Your Guns, Emarosa, and Oceans Ate Alaska, and then we're planning on hopefully hitting some bigger markets and venues later in the winter. We don't know what bands we're taking out yet, and we don't know where we're going, but we know that we're going above and beyond anything we've done in the past. We always plan on hitting as much of the world as possible with every record, and that's the case this time as well.

BLESSTHEFALL

Interview with Beau Bokan by Joe Daly
Photographs by Douglas Sonders

"IT'S A COOL STORY ABOUT LOVE, LOSS, REVENGE, AND BETRAYAL."









UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS

Interview with Kevin Ryan Starrs by Nick DeMarino

Photograph by Ester Segarra

"WE'RE NOT GIVING PEOPLE EXACTLY WHAT THEY WANT, AND THAT'S ALWAYS A GOOD THING."

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID the word "retro" when discussing England's psychedelic doom demons Uncle Acid & the Deadbeats. With haunting melodies and vocal harmonies, they've got a vintage vibe that takes off from the exact second that The Beatles' "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" turns into that end of record sound. For their fourth outing, *The Night Creeper*, Uncle Acid looks back across film and storytelling genres to channel modern old school heaviness. With a macabre story threaded through a gamut of moody, fuzzed out tunes, it's a listening experience that's not soon forgotten. Singer, guitarist, organist, and bandleader Kevin Ryan Starrs discusses the concept and execution of Uncle Acid & the Deadbeats' *The Night Creeper*.

You've described *The Night Creeper* as an album that "could have started life as an old cheap, grime covered 25 cent pulp paperback like the type sold at newsstands outside subway stations. But then perhaps it is adapted into a film noir, which itself is then remade 20 years later as an ultraviolent, slasher Italian Giallo film."

I started thinking about *The Night Creeper* immediately after *Mind Control* [2013] was finished, and I was watching a lot of film noir at the time. I thought it would be cool to have an album related to that, and as I researched films, I found out that a lot of movies, like *The Maltese Falcon*, started as a paperback and were later made into movies. I thought about the lineage of those stories and how they were made into film noir and how a story might get remade as a Giallo film. That's what got me into the right headspace for *The Night Creeper*.

What's the story of *The Night Creeper*?

It's a character created by the press and the police. It's used to cover up police crimes in the city. They're using The Night Creeper to scare people. What's actually happening is that a police officer is killing people and blaming it on this Night Creeper character. As the story progresses, he's killing these people, but someone is actually watching him the whole time. At the end of the album, that person confronts and kills him. The song "Slow Death" is about that person torturing the police officer and eventually killing him.

You recorded *The Night Creeper* at Toe Rag Studios, a well known analog studio. How did the tracking go?

We tracked the album in three days completely live. I took the tapes away and worked on them at home. That way, when I had an idea in the middle of the night, I could go into my own studio and work on it. It's easier for me to live with the material that way. So, the actual studio recording was really quick this time. The files were recorded analog to tape, but for post-production we converted everything to digital. It's a lot easier to work on that way. Everyone thinks we record everything on vintage, analog technology, but that's not the case at all. Even the guitars don't have to be vintage. They just have to have a specific tone. But, yeah, that specific sound is easier to get with vintage equipment.

How do you explain what Uncle Acid sounds like? The obvious reference points—Black Sabbath and The Beatles—seem a bit incongruous.

Everything I listen to creeps into Uncle Acid. Taken at face value, yeah, there are lots of big riffs, so there's Black Sabbath, and yeah, there's a lot of melody and harmony, so you've got The Beatles. But there's a lot more to it than that. On the song "Downtown," there's a woman singing backing vocals, and so far no one's picked up on that. That's completely inspired by Phil Spector working with The Ronettes and The Shangri-Las. I don't know, maybe people just don't know that music. I think there's a really wide range of music on *The Night Creeper*.

There's that moody interlude "Yellow Moon" and the methodical "Slow Death." If you took them out of context, you might not identify them as Uncle Acid songs.

With "Yellow Moon," you know, Sabbath would do that—have those instrumental tracks to break things up. I think it's important to have that diversity. "Slow Death" was a strange one. We had a rough idea, and when we tracked it in the studio, it was just really long and not a lot was happening. I had an idea about where I wanted to take it, though, and worked it over again and again for a few weeks or maybe a month. I slowly built it up with tape effects, modulations, and oscillators, and the track eventually built up to this huge climax and then just fades away. That one took on a life of its own.

Why name the album after the song "The Night Creeper?" It's got a patient swagger, but isn't as obvious as some of the more direct, punchier songs.

Actually, we didn't have a title for the album. We got to the stage that Jay Shaw, this great artist, was working on the cover. He came back with the design, and it had *The Night Creeper* on it. It looked perfect, so we thought, let's just go with that. It's sensationalistic, almost. It's how newspapers would've drummed up fear. There's no historical basis for the story. It's all fiction, really, from watching film noir, but no particular film. Also, there have been a lot of police cover-ups in the UK recently, and I'm sure in America, that are well documented, so that made sense. It's also a song that was brought in by our old bass player. All the music in Uncle Acid & the Deadbeats is written by me because I don't want to compromise on it. But when he came in with the rough idea for "The Night Creeper," he said, "Take it and do whatever you want with it." So, I added a few riffs, came up with the lyrics, and tweaked things. That's the first sort of collaboration that's ever happened.

The hidden track, "Black Motorcade," is...

Yeah, that's a weird one. The record label wanted a B-side for a single, and I just recorded something really quickly on acoustic guitar. And that was "Black Motorcade." I realized the lyrics would be a perfect fit at the end of album. It represents the morning after the terror with what's happened the night before. It ties everything up. I tried to re-record it to do a slightly different version for the album, but it never sounded as good as the demo. I thought, "Fuck it, let's just

put the demo on it." It sounds different, and there are a lot of mistakes as well, including wrong notes and timing. It's got this odd vibe to it and a really interesting sound.

Your melodic and harmonized vocals are one of the defining aspects of Uncle Acid.

It's funny, because I never wanted to be a singer. That was the last thing on my mind when I started the band. I wanted to write songs and just be the guitar player. We spent months looking for a singer, and it never worked out. Eventually, I realized I had to do it or we were never going to get going. My voice came out all weird, and I didn't know what people would think. Well, I did know what they'd think—that it sounded strange. Obviously, I'm going for an Ozzy, Neil Young, John Lennon thing. I always wanted there to be harmony for the vocals. I've always liked that kind of thing, so we tried to have vocal harmonies on every single song.

Why take your cue from film noir and horror films?

I'd just watch something and think, "How can I create that same effect using sound?" If I'm watching film noir, then there are shadows, and I think of ways to use, say, a fuzz pedal to create that murkiness in the mix. I think of music in visual terms more than audio terms. The films were just the visual inspiration. The Giallo films are a psychedelic way of doing horror. The creative use of colors those Italian directors had was so different than British or American horror films. It was really creative. There are lots of weird shots and angles and really vivid blood. Something about that appealed to me. With film noir, it's also the sleaziness, the great storytelling with all the twists and turns, and femme fatales. Again, it's just something that's always spoken to me. Every album has had a different set of influences in terms of films, though we never planned it that way. The exception is *Volume 1* [2010], which is just a collection of songs. But from *Blood Lust* [2012] onward, that's how we've done it. With *Blood Lust*, I was watching a lot of British horror like *Witchfinder General* and *Blood on Satan's Claw*, and I wanted to recreate that with sound. ***Blood Lust* was well received, but your follow-up, *Mind Control*, was more divisive. How do you expect *The Night Creeper* will fare?**

I think *The Night Creeper* will divide people again, just like *Mind Control*. We're not giving people exactly what they want, and that's always a good thing. There are people who will love it and make the extra effort to understand it, to really read the lyrics and get into it, and there are other people who will listen once and be unimpressed. That's not a problem. I think that's the sign of a good album. As a listener, I want to work hard to be impressed by an album. If it's immediately accessible, it's often forgettable. A lot of people probably won't be on board for this, but music should challenge people. Good music should divide people. *The Night Creeper* isn't an album that you listen to once and you get it straight away. It's involved.



WINDHAND

Interview with Ryan Wolfe by Kevin Stewart-Panko
Photographs by Jordan Vance

"IT WAS MORE OF A MELLOW AND TRIPPY VIBE, AND IT'S REFLECTIVE MORE OF THE MUSIC THAT WE ACTUALLY LISTEN TO"

WINDHAND HAS BEEN KICKING OUT the slow and spacious jams for the better part of a decade. Long songs, occult imagery, mysterious song titles, and an ethos that evokes as much focus and concentration from the listener as it provides a droning background buzz for you to enjoy your increasingly decriminalized substance of choice. Commonly tagged as a stoner/doom metal band, the Richmond, Virginia quintet has made what drummer Ryan Wolfe describes as "great strides in coming into our own" with their latest full-length, *Grief's Internal Flower*. There have been a number of novel steps taken by Windhand on their third album, as changes were made in everything from the songwriting and production, all the way down to musical mood created by the band themselves. We spoke with Wolfe smack dab in the middle of a break between tours, and he gave us the rundown on Windhand's world these days.

What do you feel you haven't been asked or talked about enough thus far for *Grief's Internal Flower*?

Actually, people have constantly been asking us about what we've been listening to and our favorite metal. Everything is about metal, which I guess is fair, as we're a metal band, but we're not balls to the wall all the time. I feel there are a lot of broad strokes and approaches with bands that are easy to pick out, but there's also a lot of different music in there. But I don't know how to answer that question (laughs).

Was there anything that influenced or inspired this album differently than you hadn't experienced in the past? What really stood out for you about this record?

This was the first time we've ever actually sat down to write a record. Everything we've ever done before, it was like, "Hey, we have music. We should record it." Then, eventually, we'd have a record. This time we were writing a record that had to be done. We booked studio time [with producer Jack Endino at Soundhouse Studio in Seattle, Washington], and there was pressure. Granted, most of the songs had been written, but parts weren't completely finished. We finished a lot of parts a week before going into the studio or in the studio. There are two parts, one in "Kingfisher" and one in "Hesperus," that were completely different a week before we left. They were more mechanical, heavier, and completely abrasive, and it just sounded awful. It didn't sound like us or what we wanted. When we sat around and threw out ideas of what we were going for, it was more of a mellow and trippy vibe, and it's reflective more of the music that we actually listen to—Grateful Dead, Pink Floyd, 70s country music, Jimi Hendrix. There's a lot of stuff out there that we listen to that we were finally able to get into the zone where we're playing more like stuff like that. We played the end of "Kingfisher" for like 20 minutes in the studio, and Jack's there waving his hands through the window telling us to quit. And we're, "Nah, dude. We're figuring this out. Just let it go." We figured it out and caught the vibe right there. So, we did a couple things that were out of our element and safety zone.

Was there anything else outside of that comfort zone?

Well, going out to record with Jack in the first place. Garrett [Morris, guitar] has always recorded us in our practice space.

Why did you decide to not only record outside of your practice space, but do it with a producer on the other side of the country?

Jack was behind all of those early Sub Pop recordings, and for most of us and our love of music and following bands, those bands were some of our biggest influences. He facilitated a lot of those recordings and was the mastermind behind it all. We did a couple tours with High on Fire, and it was around that time we decided to do something differently, to go somewhere to take pressure off Garrett. Like I said, we record in our practice space, and his equipment is a little antiquated and a little bit more hands on than digital stuff, so it's very stressful for him to do a full 70 minute album. We wanted to make it easy for ourselves. So, we were poking around the High on Fire guys, asking how their experience recording with Jack was. They had nothing but great things to say, and we met him briefly when we played Seattle. Relapse put out feelers to him, and he was more than excited and eager to do it.

So, was it easier?

Ah...well, yeah...kind of (laughs). Overall, it was fucking amazing. When we've recorded

previously, it was on quarter inch tape, so when you flub something, especially drums, we gotta redo the whole song, even if everyone's like, "Oh, don't worry about it. It sounds great." With the beauty and magic of modern technology, if you flub a little bit of this or don't hit a cymbal full on or something, you don't have to really worry about it. Jack would be, "Don't worry. Did you play in time? Did you play the parts the way you wanted? Okay, I'll fix it. That's easy shit." Jack was amazing. There's a reason that dude has been recording for 30-odd years. He's actually also a legend in South America. He goes down there to record bands, and some of the bands he's recorded down there have gone on to win Grammys, or whatever the Argentinean version of a Grammy is. He was awesome. He had a lot of great ideas, he really pushed Dorthia [Cottrell, vocals], getting her to include different harmonies in some of the songs. Garrett picked up a ton of techniques just from watching, and we made a cool friend and got to hear a shit-ton of cool stories.

With all of these changes and a few years of experience under your belts, has the meaning of the band changed for you?

The best way to say it is that it's become a job. I'm 38 and have been playing in bands since I was 15, and this is probably the hardest I've ever worked on something, but it's also the easiest. I don't mean that in a bragging sense, but it's easy because it's so enjoyable. I'm not dragging my ass playing to three people in the middle of Iowa. It's paying off, and we're seeing it. The band has grown a lot, and it's cool because with us playing music that we listen to, it's more satisfying. It makes it an easier thing to want to get into a van with four other people for a month. There have been moments in my life where I've thought to myself, "What the fuck am I doing?" That's usually while being stuck in Oklahoma playing to no one. I never thought the band would get to the point to where it's taking us places, and it's pure joy.

Is there anything you're planning on doing differently, in terms of promoting the new album or the amount of touring?

Relapse hasn't shied away from this album. They've definitely gone above and beyond as far as the promotion of this album, and it's nice to have a label that supports you like that. There are a lot of recluses in the band, and it can be hard to see yourselves everywhere all the time, but we're trying to do everything we can. Relapse is definitely putting us out there, which we've agreed upon. We're going to be touring in the fall, and next year come spring time it'll be the same thing—going to Europe, Australia, and doing the US again. We're not planning on backing down on our end or trying to change what we've done. We have a pretty good game plan as far as how we want to tour and who we want to tour with.

On a different note, what does the name Windhand refer to?

I believe that Asechiah [Bogdan, guitar] found it in a William S. Burroughs poem where there was a reference to a windhand. I think that's where it was originally stumbled upon.

Is the title of the new album, *Grief's Internal Flower*, your way of saying something like every cloud has a silver lining?

That is something we won't really go into depth on. The lyrics and everything is stuff we try to keep personal and try not to let get out there. We leave it to the listener to make their own interpretation. We've exposed ourselves a lot, but we try to keep song meanings and titles close to the vest. And I'm the drummer, so that's all I can say about that (laughs).

Does that carry over to how much of yourselves you're willing to divulge on social media platforms?

I think so. I'm by far the biggest mouth of the band. I talk non-stop, am always out there, and like connecting with people. But there are still parts of the band that we feel are ours. We do this for ourselves. We're not making music for anyone else, and there's still a lot of areas of this band that we try to keep to ourselves and personal. We'd rather have the listeners take their own journey and not try and dictate anyone else's trip.







UNSUNG HEROES occasionally get sung. Such is the case for seminal doom band Pentagram. After their 2011 comeback album, *Last Rites*—in part spurred by the high-profile documentary *Last Days Here*—things were looking up. Then, after a couple years of touring, guitarist Victor Griffin left the fold again. He has the longest track record with founding vocalist Bobby Liebling and is responsible for the guitar on many of Pentagram's most celebrated albums, including the band's 1985 debut, *Pentagram* (later reissued as *Relentless*). Though his participation had waned in recent years, Griffin has returned full tilt for their newest album, *Curious Volume*, and it's a doozy. Legendary guitarist Victor Griffin discusses his intermittent tenure in Pentagram, his contributions to the doom scene, and the variety of material on *Curious Volume*.

After all these decades and eight albums, how does Pentagram go about writing a new album like *Curious Volume*?

We began writing material toward the end of last year. It was a pretty quick process. We were on the road, had put aside time to write and to go into the studio, but it kept getting pushed back. By the time the studio was booked, we were short on time. I think that worked out pretty cool. We didn't have too much time to overthink material. We had already decided to go back to a raw sound, less production—fewer bells and whistles. Bobby [Liebling, vocals] always has a few songs from old demos that he wants to pull out, and we rework them. There are three or four songs on the album that were old stuff. There's stuff he wrote in the 70s—"Sufferin'" and "Lay Down and Die"—and, of course, "Earth Flight." There are a few different versions that have been previously recorded. I really dig the one we did on this album because, well, I made it. I think that was more of a late 90s or early 2000s tune. Everything else was pretty much brand new material. Either Bobby wrote it, I wrote it, Greg [Turley, bass] wrote it, or it was co-written. *Curious Volume* is a pretty good combination of material. All the flavors of doom are there. It's just a heavy rock album, as well. Oh, and the song "Misunderstood" is almost, not punk, but just straight-up rock 'n' roll. I wrote that song back in 1984. It was my tribute to bands from the late 70s, like The Dead Boys and The Dictators. I've always been a big fan of that stuff. We

used to play that song live in the mid 80s, but it's never been recorded, so that's cool. I was surprised we ended up putting it on the album. It's so un-Pentagram-like. Once we got it mixed in with the other songs in the studio, it made sense. *Curious Volume* is a pretty good mix of material. It has the stuff the older doom crowd is going to dig, plus a lot of heavy rock. Doom metal is really just heavy rock, anyway. We're not the band that plays super slow stuff. You say doom now and people think of something different. But, if you go back and listen to our first couple of records, *Pentagram* and *Day of Reckoning*, they aren't really that slow. ***Curious Volume* has a raw sound, but it's recorded with modern equipment. Recording was analog when you started. What do you think of digital?**

I don't mind it. I don't want to get too polished, so that it's not what we sound like live, but there's something to be said for high quality production. There are a lot of dynamics, especially when it comes to songwriting, and you can make material more interesting in the studio. There's a line—and you have to be careful—when it comes to overproduction, though. It's a lot like touching up photos, only you're dealing with music. There's a temptation to go overboard and mess with it. Some of the Place of Skulls and In-Graved stuff has bordered on that. *Last Rites*, the previous Pentagram album, was a bit more produced, but I think the material called for it.

You've been in and out of Pentagram numerous times over the years, even recently.

It's nothing I want to get into detail about, but the last eight years have been the hardest years of my entire life. As far as personal issues go, there have been different things I've had to deal with, and there were times I just didn't feel fit to be out on the road, not that I didn't want to be. I just don't want to be there and not giving 100 percent. That's not fair to the band or the fans. Really, that's not even fair to me. I had certain struggles. I wouldn't call it a midlife crisis, but different things came up. I have had episodes of depression and things like that. A lot of that stuff is what I write about in songs, actually. I wear my heart on my sleeves with lyrics. If anyone sits down and listens to a Place of Skulls song, then they know me by those lyrics. I've never been one for fantasy lyrics or sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll type stuff. There have been things in my personal life, things

I've discussed with Bobby and Greg, and they've been understanding and supportive. [Matt [Goldsborough] was back on guitar in my place for shows for a bit. Everything's cool now, though. I've made a lot of strides with my issues. I'll be back from here on out.

What has it been like since the 2011 documentary *Last Days Here*, with Pentagram and especially Bobby having larger profiles?

Bobby and I have a good relationship. We've worked together since 1981, so we're going on 35 years together. As far as the documentary goes, I guess that was shocking for a lot of people. It wasn't really shocking for me, though. I was there for a lot of that. I've seen that and a lot of the same situations. In the 80s and 90s, we were partners in crime a lot of the time. But toward the end of the 90s, I was in pretty deep myself, so I left Pentagram. Bobby and I have always been able to talk and be open with one another. I've never really tried to hide anything. I've struggled with depression and spiritual issues. A lot of that darkness is in the Place of Skulls and In-Graved stuff. Even on *Curious Volume*, the lyrics deal with personal struggles. I think a lot of people get encouragement from that. I get messages from people who say this song or that song was encouraging to them. It's cool to be an encouragement to people. We've been given this gift, this opportunity. When we were in our 20s and 30s, Bobby and I were clawing and fighting to get to the point we're at today. Now, I'm 53 and I think Bobby is 61, and it's just amazing. I can't believe this has happened for us this late in life.

One of your contributions to doom and music at large is drop B tuning. How did that first come about?

That happened completely by accident. When I was 17 or 18, I was in my room, in my parents' basement. It's a typical rock 'n' roll kid story. I was trying to figure out what else could be done with drop tuning. I kept tuning up and down on the low E string, then got lower and lower until I hit B. I noticed it was an octave, played a fifth up and down the top two strings, and just thought, "Wow." It was wicked. I'd never heard anyone play that before on any recordings. To the best of my knowledge it hadn't been done. From there I pretty much wrote "Death Row" and "All Your Sins" in a single day with that new tuning. There have been many other drop B songs after that in Pentagram and

Place of Skulls. As years went on, I ended up showing Scott Weinrich, you know, "Wino" [The Obsessed, Saint Vitus, Spirit Caravan, The Hidden Hand, etc.], and he started playing with it. Bands like Cathedral and even newer doom bands ended up using it. It's one of those crazy flukes. Every now and then, someone brings it up, but most people don't mention or realize it. I'm grateful it happened. It was one of those weird creative flukes that's still influencing people.

What did you enjoy most about recording *Curious Volume*?

We started up at Magpie Cage Recording Studio in Baltimore with Sean Saley on drums. After we finished tracking the drums, he decided he was leaving the band. At that point, we didn't know whether to keep his drums or not. Now, I've worked with Pete Campbell off and on for 10 years. He did a couple of Place of Skulls tours and an In-Graved album a couple of years ago. He was an automatic choice for me. After talking to Bobby and Greg, Pete came on board. I knew we could send him tracks in a pinch. He does his homework, and he came in and redid the drum tracks. I came back to Lakeside Studios in Knoxville and recorded all the rhythm tracks with Travis Wyrick, who I've worked with off and on for 15 years. Meanwhile, Greg was recording the bass back in Virginia. I guess with digital, it's not all that unusual. The best thing, really, was that we were unsure about the material, but it all came together in a pinch. I've grown to love that way of recording. You're not so burnt out on the material. You don't necessarily know what you have, then you end up with something more creative and interesting than you realized you had.

REINVIGORATED AND REFOCUSED, Sweden's melodic death metal masters Soilwork has been releasing album after album of phenomenal material. It started in 2010 with the return of guitarist Peter Wichers for *The Panic Broadcast* and continued without him on 2013's epic *The Living Infinite*. Now, despite personal tragedies and professional frustrations, Soilwork unleashes its 10th album, *The Ride Majestic*, a decidedly darker though not unprecedented turn. Call it progressive if you like—it certainly integrates a range of styles and approaches—but Soilwork has rarely sounded so immediate and forceful. There are twists and turns and moods and nuances, but the hooks and choruses are more memorable than you might expect. Founding vocalist Björn "Speed" Strid explains *The Ride Majestic* and Soilwork's melancholic mood.

It's only been two years since the band's double album, *The Living Infinite*. How did *The Ride Majestic* come about so quickly?

We started writing songs in September of last year. We made a decision to focus on a new album because we ran into some management problems with *The Living Infinite*. We could've toured the hell out of that album, but we only did one North American tour. We're all really proud of that album, so that frustration is where it started for us. I think we found something new with *The Living Infinite*. We rediscovered ourselves as songwriters in many ways. We picked up at that spot with *The Ride Majestic*. It captures the more melancholic parts of *The Living Infinite*. We took that darker atmosphere and cranked it. When we entered the studio, there were some personal tragedies. There were four deaths in the family of band members during the recording of *The Ride Majestic*. Obviously, it was really rough. We were expecting to go in and have a smooth time of it. It ended up actually taking longer than *The Living Infinite*. Still, we were really glad to be in the studio at the time. It gave us a lot of comfort. We were able to support each other. The album already dealt with existential questions of life and death, but this really made it hit home. We thought we were going into the studio for six weeks, but the recording dragged out to almost four months. As people kept dying, it got really surreal. My 94-year-old grandmother passed, which is only natural—she had a very good, very long life—but it was still really hard. That definitely affected me and how I approached recording and laying down the vocals. She was absolutely one of my best friends.

The bar was set pretty high after *The Living Infinite*. Did that pressure loom over *The Ride Majestic*?

I don't think we were that stressed. That album got a lot of good reviews, and we were really happy about it. It was so diverse and atmospheric. The question was where to go from there. We came in really confident after that album. Peter Wichers jumped ship before we went into *The Living Infinite*, so that was a challenge. We decided we were going to push ourselves and prove to everyone that we could do it. I think we needed to do that. We rediscovered ourselves. We were still Soilwork, but we found a new formula. If

there was any stress, any pressure, it was probably the healthy kind.

Fans have been a lot more excited about Soilwork since 2010's *The Panic Broadcast*.

Maybe some people lost interest after we became more melodic and midtempo in the 00s, which is understandable. But—*The Chainheart Machine*, *A Predator's Portrait*, *Natural Born Chaos*—looking back, I wouldn't do those any differently. That's where we were at the time. We lost a little intensity, that element of surprise, and we wanted to bring that back without forcing it. We took a more playful approach to the music, and I think that helped. We're more spontaneous now, maybe a little more progressive, as well. People that were into Soilwork in the past have rediscovered the band again. There are people that still like the *Figure Number Five* sound, though. And that's still part of our sound, to a degree. We weren't really planning things to work out like this, but we needed to challenge ourselves. It's great to be in a band for 20 years and still be challenged. **Soilwork's guitars are very prominent. How do you balance the vocal hooks with that?**

It's hard to balance with so much going on with the guitars, but we've found a way to make it work. We leave space for each other without even discussing it at this point. I really like to push myself for each and every album, and I've found so many new ways to use my voice, which makes things a lot more fun. Both Sylvian [Coudret, rhythm guitar] and David [Andersson, lead guitar] are incredible guitarists who push me. Dirk [Verbeuren, drums] is a fantastic extreme metal drummer who has brought so much into the band, as well.

What challenged you on *The Ride Majestic*?

The title track, "The Ride Majestic," didn't really shape up until the last second. We knew that it was going to be the first song on the album—the demo sounded fantastic—but it just wasn't cutting it in the studio. Then David came in and did some slide guitars on that one, which is rare in melodic death metal, but it totally fit and tied the whole song together. We're one of the few bands in this genre that has shades of the blues. "Alight in the Aftermath" was just a mesh of styles, which I'm normally not very good at. It really challenged me. There's all this intense riffage, and when Dirk plays drums, it turns into this crazy thing. It was hard for me to cerebrally grasp how to approach it. I just had to follow the feeling in there, and I found something interesting.

You haven't mentioned the departure of longtime bassist Ola Flink.

I understand how, from the outside, it might look like a bit of a circus. "Oh, another member is jumping out of that band. It's Björn and hired hands." If you were actually in the band, though, it'd feel a lot more natural. We've been doing this for 20 years. I was 17 when Soilwork formed, and I'm 37 today. A lot of stuff has happened along the way. It's only natural that people pursue other things in life, like kids and getting married. Not that you can't be in a band and have kids or be married. It's a matter of growing up and entering your adult life with the band. That's a special thing.

Even though there have been lineup changes, we've also had members come in with new ideas. Dirk brought in a lot with his drumming. Then Sylvain with his guitar playing. Then David with his guitar playing. I'm not the leader type that tries to get people to play Soilwork music. It's not like, "Okay, this guy is a shredder. Let's see if he can pull off Soilwork and make sure he fits." It's always been very important to me that anyone who comes in brings their own selves, musically and on a personal level. That's the only way to maintain this band for it to make sense.

Speaking of which, your other band with David Andersson, The Night Flight Orchestra, released its second album, *Skyline Whispers*, this year.

That band has been a really cool, really big thing for me. I'm so glad that I met David and that we connected so well. I always wanted to be in a classic rock band. It's hard to do the Lou Gramm [Foreigner] thing and then go back to the Tom Ayara [Slayer] stuff in Soilwork. The band has always been about fusing influences, and we're a musical chameleon, really, but The Night Flight Orchestra is different. It's helped me discover all these new things about my voice. It's not always as easy to hear that in Soilwork, but it's there.

One of the bigger, more straightforward songs on *The Ride Majestic* is "Petrichor by Sulphur." How does a song like that come about?

David wrote that song. It's almost has a "Hangar 18" [Megadeth] feel to it, like a melodic death metal version of it. It showcases some of his melodic but very melancholic writing. It's pretty bluesy in parts, too. It's definitely a strong song. I think it has some of that black metal disco in there. That's a sound that's on "The Ride Majestic (Aspire Angelic)," the other "Ride Majestic" titled song, too. When Markus [Wibom] came in on bass, he asked what was up with that Dracula disco song. I really liked that description. I think it makes sense. I've always been a sucker for stuff like that. So, yeah, Dracula disco.

***The Ride Majestic's* closer, "Father and Son, Watching the World Go Down," is a bit of a curveball, but makes total sense in context. What's the story there?**

It's pretty much what the title says it's about. About a year ago, I had a dream, a really horrifying dream, about me and my dad. I'm in my parents' living room, and there's this moment where the two of us realize that this is the end. There's almost like a rumble or something, and we know it's not just an earthquake. We see the horror in each other's eyes and realize, hey, this is it. It felt so real. I woke up, and I was literally shaking. I knew I had to do something with that, to challenge that experience, so I put it into lyrics. I still can't deal with that dream. I'm glad, at least, that I could put it to a song. It's the perfect ending for *The Ride Majestic*.

SOILWORK

Interview with Björn "Speed" Strid by Nick DeMarino
Photographs by Hannah Verbeuren
"WE TOOK THAT DARKER ATMOSPHERE AND CRANKED IT."





MAX CAVALERA IS A LEADER of the heavy metal community. He's a true soldier that has been through the trenches more than a few times in his 31 year career in the music business, proving himself time and time again. His band Soulfly is one of the most important metal bands in existence today, not to mention his legendary status as former guitarist/vocalist in Brazilian metal groundbreakers Sepultura. Soulfly's 10th full-length album, *Archangel*, is a slab of raging metal that hints back to *Prophecy* and *Roots*, which will help to solidify the band's world domination. Opening track "We Sold Our Souls to Metal" is a fitting song and a true testament to how Cavallera lives his life.

Archangel is a beast of an album, and "We Sold Our Souls to Metal" says it all.

I wanted to write a song about metal for a long time, but I never really got down to doing it. It took 30 years to write a song about the music I love. I thought the best way to express this was to call it "We Sold Our Souls to Metal." We had this two minute piece of thrash music, and it was real exciting and powerful. I just laid down some riffs with simple lyrics, and it came out really good. We're playing that song live now, and people are loving it and singing along to it. So, I think that's killer.

Archangel hearkens back to *Prophecy* and even has hints of *Roots*. Soulfly returned to form with *Savages*, but what were you trying to accomplish with the new album?

The main thing was to try and do a different record. Although clearly *Savages* was a return to some of the more groove material, I needed something totally different for the next record. It's our 10th record, and my mindset was we had to go deeper in every way. I came up with the topic of *Archangel* and had more like a biblical background on the record. I have to say, Matt Hyde [producer] was a huge help. He really helped me bring out my best. It's got some really cool riffs—a little faster than *Savages*, which I like it more like that. I like fast stuff more. There's still some grooves in there. I'm very pleased with the record because it has that exotic element that is a little bit like *Prophecy*.

There are interesting elements on the album, such as the flute on "Bethlehem's Blood" and some Middle Eastern/Egyptian flavors. How did these come into play?

That's because of the song itself—it had this biblical feeling to it. I talked to Matt to see how we can make it even deeper and more authentic. I even did chants with my vocals on songs such as "Sodomites" and "Shamash." It was pretty fun and crazy recording, but it was really cool coming out with those songs, and I'm really pleased with them.

Speaking of biblical references, you've always traveled a spiritual path, but what initially sparked ideas for tracks such as "Archangel," "Sodomites," and "Bethlehem's Blood?"

Pretty much the Old Testament. If you read the Old Testament, it's a bloody book. It's a violent book. It's got a lot of violent stories, and I was surprised by how good they work with metal. A song like "Sodomites," which is about the destruction of Sodom, is perfect for metal. It can't get anymore perfect than that. We actually found things in the Bible that were very heavy. I found some quotes that are in "Sodomites." The opening quote in "Sodomites," it's incredible that it's a quote from the Bible because it's so violent. It is all from the Old Testament, and I really like that kind of stuff. I wanted some of the record to go in that direction and the other part of the record to be totally different, about metal. "We Sold Our Souls to Metal" and "Live Life Hard!" are about being metal and loving being a metalhead.

Guitarist Marc Rizzo's playing is incredible throughout *Archangel*. What was the collaboration process like on this one?

That's his thing. He loves doing that, and I love when he does that because that's the kind of chemistry I had with Andreas Kisser. That's why Sepultura always had these little guitar things between and at the beginning of songs. Actually, they weren't really leads, they were effects. I encouraged Marc to do a lot of that. He also does leads, which I love the shredding stuff, but I also love some of the guitar noises he makes, which some are out of this world. For example, on "Archangel," the guitar sounds like a video game. He's making the guitar sound like an old Nintendo video game. So, I really love all that, and he adds a lot to the record. Overall, I gave him a lot of room and told him to go nuts. There's never too much for me. I always want more, and the more you can do to make the track exciting, I'm all for it.

The neo-classical/post-modern cover artwork from Eliran Kantor is top-notch. How did you bring him aboard, and was there any kind of instruction you gave him?

The original idea was to use an old icon like a Russian or an Eastern European St. Michael

icon. Because *Archangel* is pretty much about St. Michael, we wanted to use old imagery. The label found out about this idea, and they had this artist Eliran lined up. They told me it's my call if I wanted to go with the old icon, but that they had a guy that could probably make it look really killer. I gave it a shot, and the only thing I mentioned to Eliran was how he could combine the old, classic world of *Archangel* with the world of Soulfly, and if he could combine those, it would be a winner. And that's what he did with the *Archangel* wings turning into the Soulfly symbol, and then the weapon of the angel turning into the Soulfly symbol. So, that was the most killer thing I got from that artwork, apart from the colors and what it looks like, because it's like an old painting from a museum. It's probably my most talked about artwork. That normally doesn't happen with the artwork, so I was happy that it happened with this record.

Your son Zyon's drumming is stepped up even more on *Archangel*. Describe his playing on the album.

He has become better and better. Playing live with him, he's like a wild animal. I really like that energy—it's like out of control. I love this out of control vibe he gives. I told Matt that we have to capture that out of control drum playing and somehow put it on the record, so it was Matt's task to do that. At one point Matt even said that it reminded him of Dave Lombardo, and I was really happy to hear that comment. He's growing a lot; he's only 21. This time around, the experience in the studio was much more brutal for him recording, but it was much better, too, what he got out of it. We drilled him pretty good, but for his own good, too. He came out a better musician out of that session.

You've carved out more than one successful musical career—Soulfly, Sepultura, not to mention Nailbomb and Cavallera Conspiracy. What keeps you going?

I just really like to be a part of the metal world, to be a part of the whole thing. We didn't get into this for the fame or anything like that. What we get out of this is the fans going crazy—a big circle pit in front of me. That's my payment right there. That's a good day when I see that happening. I love the underground. I love the metal bands and love to see the underground alive and well. And I like to be helping and be a part of it. It's a great feeling. I'm just really into metal, and I really want to be part of the metal scene as much as I can.

Your personality and mannerisms really showed through on the pages of your autobiography. It's like you're right in the room telling the stories. Was that your intention, and are there any plans for a follow-up book?

Yeah, we want to do more stuff in the future. We really like the way the book came out. I think Joel McIver [co-writer] did a great job. He did exactly what you said—it's me talking directly to the fans. They can feel it, it's like I'm sitting next to them telling my story. Whether it's a funny story like me puking on Eddie Vedder, or if it's a sad story like the death of my father or the death of Dana [Wells, stepson]. It's me right there next to the person telling the story, and I think that was the key to the book. That's why so many people like the book, because it was a very honest conversation. It was me telling them everything about myself and this crazy music career that I lived. I was happy with the final results of the book, and I'm glad people like it.

You just keep going strong, but is there anything you'd like to accomplish or achieve next? Longevity is really what I'm looking for now. I'd like to do more stuff with Killer Be Killed and have a big world tour for *Archangel*. I want to tour all next year. Apart from that, just to keep going and living and loving metal everyday. Sold my soul to metal—that's pretty much it!





LEAVES' EYES

Interview with Liv Kristine by Nick DeMarino
Photographs by Stefan Heilemann

"THIS ISN'T AN ALBUM ABOUT THE FLOWERS, THE BEES, LOVE, OR DISAPPOINTMENT. IT'S DIFFERENT, AND IT WAS CHALLENGING"

THE WORD "EPIC" GETS THROWN around a lot in symphonic metal. Still, it's hard to think of a better adjective that sums up Leaves' Eyes sixth album, *King of Kings*. A larger than life historical story, full orchestration plus additional instruments, folk and classical flourishes, and Vikings—it's rare to see an established act swing for the fences like this, but if any band is up to the task, it's Leaves' Eyes. With years of experience, recording projects, and studio time behind (and, hopefully, ahead) of them, the members of Leaves' Eyes know their way around their instruments and a concept album. The Norwegian/German troupe is in top form on *King of Kings*, and founding vocalist Liv Kristine discusses Leaves' Eyes new album and the legacy of Harald Fairhair.

King of Kings is a concept album. Why go that route?

This started exactly two years ago, around the release of our fifth album, *Symphonies of the Night*. We had a band meeting—Alexander [Krull, keyboardist, male vocalist], Thorsten [Bauer, guitarist], and myself—and we were just throwing ideas out. Alex said, "Why don't we do another concept album?" The last time we did that was *Vinland Saga* [2005], which was about Leif Erikson discovering Vinland, which is now known as Newfoundland. Alex suggested something about the history of my birthplace in Norway, and, as we kept talking, it made sense. I'm well equipped with books and information about that. The king of kings is Harald Fairhair, of course, who was the first person in the Middle Ages who won certain battles over semi-kings and earls and, after one decisive battle near my birth town, became the Viking king—the first king of Norway. These are stories I grew up with. It was Alex's idea, though. We checked online to see if it'd been done before and, to our surprise, it hadn't been done. So, I put my nose in some books and fleshed it out. So, yes, *King of Kings* is a concept album. There's a lot of information, a lot of facts, but there's even more fiction. Most of the information comes from the Norse sagas. On the other hand, though, it's a very personal story, strongly linked to my birthplace. This is a personal passion for me.

How did you translate all that research into lyrics?

First, I just gathered as much information as I possibly could. There were documents,

stories like the sagas, and there was poetry. I used all of that for inspiration. Then, I write what I call bullshit lyrics for the music. They are just a string of phonetic sounds of how I imagine the vocal lines will sound with the music. So, once I have the bullshit lyrics, I take all of the information I've gathered and put everything together with proper lyrics. I know it's not a usual way to work. It takes a little bit longer, but in the end you've got music and lyrics that go hand in hand. It's a giant puzzle.

What about Harald Fairhair's story resonated with you?

My birthplace is connected to this story. That's something essential about this whole thing. When it comes to Vikings, well, that's something we're fed on a spoon from kindergarten. On May 17, every year, there's a huge celebration in Norway—the biggest party of the year—and we sing songs about Harald Fairhair. It's a topic that never goes out of fashion for us, and something I've always been interested in. It's a very important part of my heritage.

Does the story celebrate him, or is does it problematize his character?

I wanted to sing his story. *King of Kings* is more or less a soundtrack to Harald's story. It's funny, my husband [Alex] is just walking by and waving to me, and I realize I more or less married the German version of Harald Fairhair. Well, anyway, Viking history is heroic. All the sagas are centered around heroic tales. There's a lot to read, from Norway to Iceland and the Faroe Islands. He's a character who pops up here and there in a lot of countries and stories. I went to the Faroe Islands as a guest of the band Týr last year and, while I was there, went to the library and was surprised to find all these lovely books that included stories in which Fairhair appeared.

***Symphonies of the Night* reinvigorated Leaves' Eyes as well as your longtime fans. *King of Kings* is so much bigger and grandiose than that, though. Why the push?**

First of all, a very important thing in this whole process—and why it became such a big production—was the switch to AFM Records. We wouldn't have thought about the composition, recording, and mixing of additional instruments and voices, including the London Voices choir, otherwise. The switch was a healthy step for us. When you're feeling creative and get that kind of

support from a label, it's golden. As I said, we had the London Voices as well as the Whiterussian Symphonic Orchestra. All the additional instruments are natural, real instruments on the album. It takes time and money to do something that epic. I mean, there are 350 channels to mix for one song. Black Sabbath's *Black Sabbath* had, what, six or seven channels? So, Alex was busy with sub-mixing for weeks and weeks before he could even do the full mix, then the master. Without Alex's skills we wouldn't have been able to do this. My husband was already a night owl and a perfectionist, but this really pushed him. When we were two-thirds of the way through the whole process, we had to get some support on the technical side in the studio. It was just so much for one mix. The people who build these machines were surprised by what we were doing. Usually, it's the people who give up, but this time it was the machines that gave up.

What was the most difficult aspect of *King of Kings* for you as a vocalist?

I had to record some of the vocals three times before I was satisfied. On this album, we paid a lot of attention to the expression of each musical piece. The album has 13 songs, each representing a different chapter in Harald Fairhair's history. We didn't want to have a ballad then a burning fjord in the darkness of Norway, so we had to really work on the expression and emotion within each song and from one song to the next. *King of Kings* is really like a soundtrack. And if the audio input is strong enough, it should trigger visuals, even if it's something that only takes place in your head. So, each song had an expression, and we rerecorded the vocals after the instruments until it fit. It's like working with puzzle pieces. It's interesting to see how much music changes when you switch the manner of singing. During the recording of *King of Kings*, I realized something that's hugely important to pay attention to, especially when you have lyrics with a theme or special content. This isn't an album about the flowers, the bees, love, or disappointment. It's different, and it was challenging at times. So far, I've been lucky. I could always trust my vocal chords. I've been equipped with two strong vocal chords, and it's been great fun and quite interesting to try new singing techniques. It's interesting to see what happens to these tiny muscles in your neck. As a vocalist, you

train them, and I think the healthiest way to build them up is to do a variety of things. It helps you be able to recreate those sounds live, too. It's such a pity for someone to do something in the studio and then not remember how to do it on stage. You need to learn by doing things for yourself.

Leaves' Eyes albums often include vocals in multiple languages. How did you choose the languages on *King of Kings*?

For this album, it's 90 to 99 percent modern English, but I use a few words from Middle and Old English. There's some Norwegian in there, too. My son, who's 12-years-old, talks in Norwegian on the intro. That's my mother tongue. I also sing in Icelandic, which is very close to Old Norwegian. I've mainly tried to use the languages I've found in the information. You can find very good translations of the sagas in English, but the interesting thing is I had to translate Norwegian poems into good, modern English to make them fit a chorus. I found some translations online, where you can find anything, but saw they were miles apart from the original. I ended up being highly creative with the translations.

Atrocity—which is Leaves' Eyes without you as the primary vocalist—has been releasing albums on a similar schedule to Leaves' Eyes. You've also got your own solo work. Is it difficult to time all these releases around and sometimes on top of each other?

We have two studios, so even if Alex is busy mixing for Atrocity, Thorsten and I might be composing music for Leaves' Eyes or one of my solo albums in the other studio. Someone is always up to something in these studios. Nothing is in the shadow of anything else, though. We just do things in a parallel way. While Alex continues working on *Okkult II*, I may decide to do another solo album. We have parallel projections. It's not hard to be creative at the same time. When you're feeling inspired, you work on something. If you're not feeling inspired, someone else probably is. We're always creative.







ATREYU

Interview with Alex Yarkatzas by Nick DeMarino

Photographs by Porter McKnight

"NO MATER WHAT, WE WANT TO GET OUT THERE AND BE AT THE FOREFRONT AGAIN."

NOT EVERY BAND that goes on hiatus comes back. Those that do normally offer a "return to form" or an "exciting new direction," depending on the press release. Not so for Atreyu. The metalcore darlings of Orange County, California pressed pause in 2011 and have now rewound their sound to an exact tipping point—just before they added more melody and then absconded into genre hopping territory during the later half of the 2000s. Atreyu's sixth album, *Long Live*, finds the quintet with sharper attacks and energetic changes. Big, melodic choruses are still in the mix, but only as contextual payoffs. The band has updated itself by picking an earlier branch in its evolution and exploring punctuated equilibrium with the benefit of hindsight. As a result, *Long Live* is familiar but refreshing. Who says you can't go home again? Founding vocalist Alex Yarkatzas discusses Atreyu's break and their sixth album.

What's the story behind *Long Live*?

It's our triumphant return to making music. It's us getting back together, you know, jamming with my brothers. We've been out of the game for a little bit, and it just seemed like it was time to come back and kick some ass. *Long Live* is our mission statement. We're in this for life. We love it.

Why the break then?

We've all been in a band together for a long time—since I was 13 or 14. The other guys were about the same age, too. Atreyu has been an active, touring band since I was 19. We decided to take a break when I was 29, so that's after a decade of touring and five full-length records. We were burnt out. Not necessarily on each other, but there have been ups and downs, traps and blessings, and good and bad in our experiences with the music industry. We were in a good place, but the fire inside us was dwindling. We didn't want to keep beating a dead horse or retrace the places we'd been. None of us stopped to do other projects—it wasn't like we wanted to focus on other things—but we ended up doing other things. My studio project [I Am War] wasn't in my mind until a year and a half into our break. My wife and I really wanted to have a kid, so we went through all of that. Now we have a one-year-old, and the other dudes had other things they did. We've been in this band for a really long time. We grew up in this band. It's a gnarly thing. Most people don't grow up like that, and we wanted to see what life was like without the band.

What did you find out in the interim?

That we're really lucky dudes in many ways. We're lucky to be able to take a break from something like the music industry, where people work so hard to get into it and keep things going, and that we can be successful in other things, too. Dan [Jacobs, lead guitar] runs a merchandise company. Brandon [Saller, drums, clean vocals] has his other band, Hell or Highwater, and his own songwriting. Marc [McKnight, bass] is a talented graphic artist. Travis [Miguel, guitar] was in Trapt for a while. I own and run a gym, am a father,

and am apprenticing for tattooing. Doing all this other stuff was great, but it created the need for an outlet. And, for us, that outlet has always been Atreyu.

Who initiated the revival?

Dan spearheaded everything. We weren't all hanging out a ton. I think it was three years before we were all together as a unit again. We went out to dinner, and Dan wanted to get playing again, but it wasn't the right time. So, every so often, we'd all meet up and take stock. Eventually, we decided to play a show locally for the 10 year anniversary of *The Curse* [2004]. From there, we decided to play a few more shows, then to put out one or two songs for free. It just kept going from there.

Given Atreyu's hiatus, a lot of eyes are on you now.

I feel like there's a peak in perception for us at the moment. That's because the fire is back when we play live. I take it as a personal responsibility to give my best possible performance in every situation. There are a lot of great bands out there and even a lot of shitty bands people perceive as great. I want us to go out there and give the best show we can. I want people to see a hardworking, awesome live band. We don't have frills. No bullshit. We're pretty cut and dry. Playing with a lot of younger bands has helped energize us, too. We've got to keep up with the young guns. I don't know if we'll live up to the hype or not. No mater what, we want to get out there and be at the forefront again.

Were things different in the studio for *Long Live*?

Not to disparage any of the producers we worked with before, because they're all professional, cool guys, but I've never felt comfortable with another person in the room. With Fred Archambault, who produced *Long Live*, he brought a lot to the table, but he also held back. He let us do what we wanted to do. He helped us be the best version of ourselves that we could be. Another thing was that the label gave us space and didn't push for singles. They didn't hear anything until we were six or seven songs deep into *Long Live*. They gave us space and were stoked on what we turned in.

You've referred to *Long Live* as the missing link between *A Death-Grip on Yesterday* [2006] and *Lead Sails Paper Anchor* [2007]. Would you elaborate on that?

I've been rethinking that lately. I almost think of *Long Live* as a *Choose Your Own Adventure* record. Coming off of *The Curse*, we did *Death-Grip*, and that's my favorite Atreyu record. Still, I could see us releasing *Long Live* instead of *Death-Grip* at that point. I don't do any melodic singing on it at all, just some creepy whispering, aggressive yelling, and what I call Anselmo-ing—deep, low vocals in the background like Phil Anselmo. I screamed 100 percent on *The Curse* and 80 or 90 percent on *Death-Grip*—with singing, or what passes for singing for me, on "Ex's and Oh's." This is the direction Atreyu could've gone after *The Curse*. Now that door is open, and we'll see where we go from there.

A Death-Grip on Yesterday was a turning point for Atreyu, but what do you think about *Lead Sails Paper Anchor* and *Congregation of the Damned* looking back now?

It's not my favorite material. I'm a painter, now a tattoo artist, and I look back at some of the paintings I've done and there's stuff I like about them, but it's not my favorite stuff that I've done. It's like that. There are bright spots, and spots where we missed the mark. On *Lead Sails*, I started to realize we were in over our heads. Being on a major label wasn't what I thought it was going to be. I don't know what I was thinking then, really. Then, on *Congregation*, I realized exactly where we were at. It wasn't that I didn't give a fuck. I don't think we ever came across that way, but I had a different attitude. *Congregation* has its moments, but it falls short of where it could've been. I mean, we tried some new stuff on those albums, and it's cool when it works. We veered outside of the band, and we all kind of felt that.

Did you take any chances on *Long Live*? What was the songwriting process like?

Everything we wrote in the past year is being put out because why waste our time with something that no one's ever going to hear? We didn't throw 30 songs together and see what worked. We wrote 12 awesome songs, and they're what is on the album. The only thing that was challenging about *Long Live* was the traffic to the studio and scheduling. Well, at least, for me. Brandon may have had some stuff for his vocals, and I know for a fact that the guitar solos were a challenge, but my vocals weren't difficult. I just pushed myself as hard as I could every day. I made a rule to only work on one song a day, to give it 100 percent and not try to save time by knocking a bunch of songs out in one day. The writing was easier, too. The guys would give me three songs at once, and I'd put together lyrics and do scrap tracks—I call them crap tracks—and, after a week of listening to them, we'd decide what worked and what needed changing.

What about lyrics? Did you write about different topics this time around?

It was a lot more raw, lyrically. These vocals, more than any others, resonate with me. It's not like *The Curse* with vampire love songs and metaphors. This record is about a lot of things that have happened in the last couple of years. There was one point where I didn't think I was going to be a father, and that raised a bunch of emotions in me, so there are songs dealing with that. There are songs, like "Long Live," that are about commitment but also addiction. It's about needing to do something because it drives you and pushes you, and you can't stop it. That's not always an unhealthy thing. I think, overall, the record is more relatable. It's not just about relationships and this and that. After a while playing music, you get past those topics and want to look at something bigger.





MISS MAY I HAS MORE THAN PROVED ITS WORTH in recent years, dropping a string of killer records and touring its collective ass off, rightfully earning a place amongst the metalcore heavy hitters of the moment. Known for the positivity they project through their anthems, behind the scenes things had grown very different, as the band struggled against numerous problems, which almost led to the demise of the five piece. However, further demonstrating their mettle, they pulled their shit together and have come back bigger, better, and angrier than ever before, the result being the savage *Deathless*. Vocalist Levi Benton gives us the lowdown.

Did you learn a lot from playing with Killswitch Engage and Five Finger Death Punch while touring *Rise of the Lion*?

Oh yeah, we learned so much. It was actually inspiring, which I know sounds weird given we've been touring so long, but after doing the main stage on Warped Tour, we crossed off the item at the top of our bucket list, and getting to go into a hockey arena with metal bands that were playing on massive stages and had five buses of production was a real "wow, this world still exists" moment.

Looking back on *Rise of the Lion*, what do you think of it now?

I love it because we wanted to do an old school metal record, and I think that it came out that way. Out of all our records I like listening to that one the most because I think the lack of crazy production and that really raw sound is nice to hear from our band. It was a lot of fun to do something different for a change.

At what point did you start thinking about the next record?

The day we left for touring *Rise of the Lion* we started writing. Right after that we did the European festivals, and I think by the time we played Hellfest, actually, we had finished our first song.

Did you have an idea of what you wanted *Deathless* to be, or did it just come together naturally?

The guys wrote a bunch of songs, 22 of them, and before I started writing lyrics, we figured out what we wanted the record to be about. We were all going through the same sort of thing. We were all in a bad place both in the band and personally, and we were just stressed out. So, when it came down to making the record, that's why it came out so aggressive.

What was going on that was putting you in this bad place?

As we were getting bigger as a band, I felt like all the contracts and corporate stuff that was happening was leaving us feeling really screwed over. On top of that, personally, I lost my house during the *Rise of the Lion* record cycle, our drummer got divorced, there was just so much negativity going on around us, and everyone was so bummed out. There were a couple of times where we didn't even know if we could keep going as a band, and I really tell the story of what was going on in the lyrics of this record.

How did you lose your house?

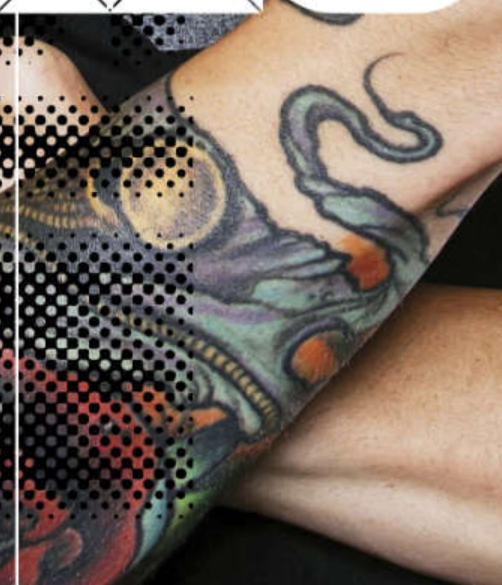
It was out of my hands. A business manager we used to have screwed up some paperwork. I bought the house and had lived in it for over a year. While I was in the studio I had a call from the bank telling me there was a problem,

MISS MAY I

Interview with Levi Benton by Dan Slessor
Photographs by Jeremy Saffer

"WE WERE ALL IN A BAD PLACE BOTH IN THE BAND AND PERSONALLY, AND WE WERE JUST STRESSED OUT."

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"WITH THIS ONE WE WANTED TO LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE STRUGGLES WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, AND THAT THERE IS A DARK SIDE."

and I needed to call the guy who had set it up. During the time it took to fix it the IRS processed those mistakes, and they sold the house out from under us. I wish it was my fault, then I wouldn't be so pissed off about it.

Who did you feel was taking advantage of you?

It wasn't our record label, management, or booking agent. They've all been awesome. It was to do with deals with corporate people and marketing stuff. It was one of those things that sounded good at the beginning, but once you get to the small print, the shit hits the fan, and that's what happened.

What was going on when you started questioning whether or not you could go on as a band?

It wasn't as if the band was doing bad, but with some of the contracts, so many people had their hands in there it was almost as if 110 percent of our financial stuff was gone—every dollar we made, three dollars got taken away because we'd signed all of these deals. It got to the point where we were saying what's the point of playing these shows, because we're a successful, larger metal band, but it felt like we didn't even own the band anymore. With this record, though, we don't say any names, but we really got that across. It sucked that we ended up in that position, where being in the band was having a negative effect on us, because we started this band to have fun. We got successful along the way, but then that was being undercut by all these deals we had made.

Have you resolved all of those issues yet? Are you managing to make money again? They're in the process of getting resolved. I think this record pricked up a lot of ears, and some people got upset that we wrote the songs that we did, but it was how we felt. Hopefully, by the end of the year we'll own our band again.

How was that affecting the relationships in the band? Were you all still getting along okay?

We were breaking down left and right individually, but us being there for each other

and everyone wanting to help each other out has actually brought us closer together rather than screwing up our friendships and relationships. We've never been closer than we are right now. We had never really been in a position where we needed to be the shoulder for others to lean on, which is lucky because things had been really good for us. But when we were put in that position, it was so cool just to see everyone pull together. We only made it through this whole thing because of that.

Once you started writing and the material began to take this aggressive direction, did it all come together quickly?

Oh yeah, and it was a cool experience writing it. One of the things I really liked is it wasn't just me writing the lyrics all about my problems. Everyone could relate to what I was writing because we'd all been through it together, and that was a really cool phenomenon. It really is such a pissed off record, and usually we write records that are inspiring. It isn't like we're not those same positive guys we were before, we've just never really let people see the dark side of us. With this one we wanted to let people know about the struggles we've been through, and that there is a dark side. It's not all rainbows and unicorns being in a band.

With it being so aggressive, was it easy to incorporate melodies, or did that take some extra work?

It was really easy. We went back with Joey Sturgis, who we did our first two records with, and we love working with him. He gets our band, and he's really good when it comes to heavy. Once we told him the story, he had a lot of ideas, and the melodies and guitar tones came together quickly.

The first song we came up with we actually wrote and recorded in the first 24 hours, and then we had eight more weeks to work on everything else. Hitting the ground running like that felt great.

Do you think there are any major stylistic turns that might surprise fans?

Yeah, I think the song "Turn Back the Time" might. It's sort of experimental for us. It

was the first time that I had ever sang softly, and it was also the first time we used some weird guitar effects. The funny thing is we didn't go out of our way to do that. It was just one of the 22 songs we went in there with, and we all liked it straightaway. We didn't want to do too much left field stuff, because we had so much good stuff that was Miss May I. I think a lot of bands throw in abstract or weird songs because they run out of ideas, but we think throwing that one in came out really great.

How easy was it whittling down the 22 songs to the 13 you ended up tracking?

It was a vote, and it was a little difficult. We did it one night. We drank a bunch of wine and sat and listened to all of them, and everyone raised their hand as to whether they thought this or that one should stay or go. We did use some of the bits from the unused songs in the ones that made the record, though, so nothing really got wasted.

You recorded your previous record with Terry Date. How does Joey Sturgis' approach differ from his?

It's very small scale. With Terry, we were in this huge, multi-million dollar studio with all of his assistants, and that was awesome. We loved it, but going back in with Joey, it was just him and his house with a computer and a little studio bedroom. It was a very old school vibe, and I think we needed that. We needed to really change it up, and his place is this cabin out in the middle of nowhere. I think we needed that. We were all stressed out, we were all depressed, we were all going through this horrible time, and we got to focus solely on writing the record, which was great.

What goals do you have for the band at this stage?

We've actually achieved a lot of our bucket list items already, and I think that although we've had some great experiences as a support act, now we want to focus on being solely a headlining band. We want to be that band that drops an album that doesn't have one or two singles on it, but has five or six, and I think *Deathless* is that record for us.

Is there a band whose career pattern you'd like to emulate?

The two that we've always really wanted to be up there with are As I Lay Dying and Killswitch Engage. I don't think that's too far of a stretch for us at this point. I think we can make it there, though without all the drama that's affected either one of them. We want to keep our original lineup, and I don't see me doing anything as crazy as Tim Lambesis.

Do you think the metalcore genre is in a healthy state right now?

Yeah, I think it's good, and there's a lot of different things with people changing it up and bringing these brighter colors and stuff into it, but we've always stuck to the original metal mentality. We try to keep the staple of long hair, tattoos, shit tons of guitar cabs, everything in black and with lots of skulls. We want to stay true to the stuff that we listened to coming up, and it's cool that we can do that and be on the main stage of Warped Tour.

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NOISE

BRING ME THE HORIZON

Interview with Oli Sykes by Dan Slessor

Photographs by Danny Baldwin

"SOME PEOPLE NEVER GET THE CHANCE TO HAVE A GOOD DAY, BUT SADNESS WE ALL ENCOUNTER, AND THAT'S WHERE THE IDEA BEHIND *THAT'S THE SPIRIT* COMES FROM."

BRING ME THE HORIZON HAS QUITE THE STORY TO TELL. Starting out as derided pretty boys trying to do deathcore, evolving into a blistering band with a sound of their own, and then pushing that further with each release, they have become one of the most exciting and daring heavy bands in the world today. When their last record, 2013's *Sempiternal*, leaked several months before its release, it could have sunk the Sheffield, England band, but instead they turned this to their advantage, effortlessly outselling their previous albums and making the leap to bigger stages. Now they return with *That's the Spirit*, which once again sees them drastically reinventing themselves, displaying humbling confidence and ever more impressive songwriting skills. We caught up with vocalist Oli Sykes to find out what went into *That's the Spirit*, how to write lyrics when for the first time your life is absent of trauma, and why they are happiest doing everything themselves.

***Sempiternal* was a huge record for Bring Me the Horizon. How much did things change for the band in the wake of that release?**

From our perspective, it was definitely the biggest change across the board, in terms of fan base, how much it sold, the shows we played off the back of it, and also, of course, in our own musical development and progression. The touring cycle was such a good time, too. For us, as a band, there have always been major ups and downs, almost to the point where it's become like an in-joke, because things can never be perfect. A case in point is looking back on *There Is a Hell, Believe Me I've Seen It, There Is a Heaven, Let's Keep It a Secret* [2010] and the campaign that came after we released it. For the most part, it was amazing. We got to play London's Brixton Academy twice, and we did a lot of cool shows, but then we did a tour with Machine Head where we were getting pretty much bottled off stage every night. There was such a contrast there. It was all high highs and low lows, but kicking off the campaign for *Sempiternal*, we really didn't get the lows. We had such a good time touring, we took it worldwide, and we capped it off with a headline show at Wembley Arena. That was a first for us, having a wholly good run.

Leading up to the Wembley show, how were you feeling? Was it something hard to comprehend, or did you feel that everything about it was right?

It's one of those things where when the possibility of such a show was suggested, you automatically say, "Well, that's just not going to happen." And then it does start happening, and everything starts building this momentum. Then it's the show itself, and honestly, I can't remember that much about it. Leading up to the actual event I just wasn't allowing myself to think about it at all, at least until the actual week of the show, when I had to start thinking about it. The show was amazing, but all I can really remember is that it was amazing, beyond that I don't remember anything. And as soon as it was over I was like, "Right, I never want to think about that again." Not in a bad way, but because it was so emotionally overwhelming.

You really changed up your vocal style on *Sempiternal*, having learned to sing and bring in all of these melodic aspects. Were you okay taxing your voice in new ways over so many months on the road?

Before I started singing, I never warmed up before a show. In 10 years of being



"DEPRESSION IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE CELEBRATED. IT SHOULD BE EMBRACED AS A PART OF WHO WE ARE."

a band, I never did anything before actually going out on stage to get my voice ready. I mean, it was all screaming, and in my opinion that's easier, because you do it at the top of your voice, just force your vocal chords, and you get the result you want. Singing is completely different, so it really was a complete shift, including learning how to take care of my voice before and after the shows, and even now I'm improving. Every day I'm getting better and better, and that's meant having to reconfigure my mind. The way I see it, everything that makes you a good screamer makes you a terrible singer, using all the air you've got and even the way your body's positioned on stage. In the studio, singing is a lot easier, because you don't have that pressure, you can take all the time that you want, and you're not trying to do it at the top of your voice all the time. But when it's live, I was initially trying to apply all the things that make me a good screamer to my singing, and that just doesn't work. I've learned a lot about how to both sing and scream subsequently, and everything I've picked up and applied has been for the better, for both styles. The more I learn the easier it gets.

With *Sempiternal* being such a big record, were you feeling any pressure following it up? Were you worried that you couldn't do as good if not better than that record? It was something that was on our minds at first. In my head, *Sempiternal* was the best thing we had done to that point, and when we made it, there was just so much more to it than anything we had done before. Anyway, we started writing again. Jordan [Fish, keyboards, who joined before *Sempiternal*] felt more comfortable, and the stuff we were coming out with was getting better. Pretty soon we just thought, "Yeah, we can definitely do something better this time." We've always been in a position where with every new record people have said, "They were shit before, but now they're good," which is a bit of a blessing and a curse. Annoying as that is, I think in some ways it was a boost, because people are acknowledging that you're getting better as a band. However, the goal with this album was to really get away from that stigma. We want to be able to give this record to someone who's never heard of our band, who has no idea where we came from or our history and have them listen to it, and for them to be able to see it as good. We want to be seen as good, not because we used to be a band with a singer who didn't know how to sing, but just to be taken solely on the merits of the record we've put into their hands. **You put out "Drown" as a single in late 2014. Was that the first song completed when you started writing for *That's the Spirit*?**

"Drown" was never actually supposed to be on the album. As I mentioned, we felt like we had progressed a lot quite soon after *Sempiternal* came out, and Jordan and I were doing a lot of writing on the road. It wasn't even really for the band. We talked about side-projects, but were never serious about that, and really it was just for the enjoyment of writing and doing it while on tour. After we dropped "Can You Feel My Heart?" the record label started pushing us to pick another single, and we looked at that album and it was at the end of the cycle. We just thought we could do something that was better than anything on there. So, "Drown" was the result of that. I can't really remember now if it was a conscious thing, but it was a really good way of testing the waters, to see how people would respond to us doing something completely removed from anything we've done before. There were no breakdowns, screams, or anything like that, and the reception was so positive it gave us that last bit of confidence that we needed to be able to say we're not going to make any compromises on this album. We're just going to do it how we do it. We're not going to worry about what people are going to say or if we're going

to lose fans. It was also testing the waters in terms of producing and recording it ourselves for the first time. Because the reception for that song was so much bigger than we thought it would be, we felt it would be a shame to just have it floating around out there and not on an album. So, we decided that it should be on there, and we're all really glad we included it.

While you were making *There Is a Hell...* you had a lot of issues with your voice, most of which were psychological, and before *Sempiternal* you were in a very dark place with drink and drugs. Did you manage to go into this one without any drama or baggage weighing you down?

Yeah, to be honest that was actually something that was worrying me. I was there thinking, "Oh, I don't have any personal crises," and it was the first time going into the record where something really fucked up hadn't happened. And because of that I didn't know what I was actually going to sing about. Everything I've written before has always been very personal, and when I say personal I mean about me. It's been about what I'm going through, and with *Sempiternal* I veered outside of that a little bit, but it was still looking back on what I had been through. I didn't have anything like that to draw from this time, and I couldn't go back and touch upon the same things. That's when I decided the new record should be about us, as a whole. I knew it shouldn't just be about me. It should be about everyone, and when I was thinking about that I realized that the only emotion that really connects all of us is sadness. I can confidently say that's the only emotion that everybody feels at some point in their life. We're not all lucky enough to have experienced happiness, some people never get the chance to have a good day, but sadness we all encounter, and that's where the idea behind *That's the Spirit* comes from. I've learnt a lot about sadness and depression over the last few years and how we cope with that and what I think we're doing wrong. I think the point is that sadness is something that we all try to block out. We try and fight it in the wrong ways. We try to ignore it or shut it out, and I think that's wrong. Depression is something that should be celebrated. It should be embraced as a part of who we are. We're all so connected now we've become so scared to be alone, and if we're not with someone, we have to be on our phones, we have to be texting, we have to be emailing and doing whatever else, because we're too scared to be alone with our own thoughts. But, I think if you let those worries and anxieties wash over you instead of trying to ignore them, sometimes it can be a beautiful experience. Even if it's not that, it can still be a much better way to deal with it. This analogy puts it in perspective—say you were back at school, and on Monday a bully comes up to you and says, "I'm going to kill you on Friday." It's not the actual beating up part that's that bad—you take the punch in the face in the moment, it hurts, and you get over it. But it's the waiting that's so bad. It's the dark clouds that are building above you leading up to that moment. I think that's what we all do inside. We try to ignore and suppress these problems, and that's what eats us up inside. But when you release these things, when you talk them over and let them out, it's not so bad.

When you were penning the lyrics, did you sit there and think, "I have to be sad and get into that mind frame to write this," or was it something you could tap into without losing yourself to it?

I don't think I had to be sad, though there were times that I was. Like I said, it's about celebrating depression. It's about making light out of the dark. That's why "Happy Song" is so sarcastic, and "Throne" is all about how you can turn grief into good. You can turn all of these horrible experiences and traumas into something good. I didn't have to be sad, because I could be happy about all the sad times. I obviously had to tap into those





same experiences, but I feel like when you do that your body knows what to do. It releases the antibodies of happiness to fight it, and it can be this euphoric experience.

Often, in England anyway, when you hear people say, "That's the spirit," it's a sarcastic thing. Were you at all concerned that people might take it as throwaway and not connected to real emotion?

That's exactly how it's supposed to be taken. The reason I picked that is because it's so ironically bleak. It's something that's meant to be positive, but is said in situations where there is no other answer, where you can't think of anything to say to make it better, and you just have to get on with it. Pessimism amuses me, when we can't see the irony of how depressing some things are, and that's what the whole album is about. "Happy Song" is about how ironic it is we cover up these negative thoughts by saying stuff that's supposed to make us sound happy. We use superficial and trivial things to forget about the problems. It's one of those if you don't laugh you'll cry situations. Obviously, the album is not supposed to be a throwaway album, but it's got that sarcastic side to it.

Musically, how would you describe *That's the Spirit*?

I don't know how to explain it (laughs). It's nothing like *Sempiternal*. Again we drew on a lot of influences, but this time everything sounds the way it does for a reason, and everything's linked, whether it's the lyrics and the music or the instruments that we chose. We've been known to be a band that uses strings and pushes things with different instruments, and to be honest, before now we've done that with no real reason beyond wanting to see how things worked with those on there. And that's really worked out well for us, mostly. This time, every sound, every lyric, every theme, it's all connected. Each song is a lot more visual, and everything in it is there to draw that picture in your mind. For example, there's a song called "Oh No," and when it starts it sounds like when you walk into a club, but it's about people who are my age or older and are still trying to live like they're 21. It's got the clichéd crowd "whoas," but it's actually singing "oh no." It's a cliché, which we would have never used in any other situation, but it highlights the theme of the song. There's a saxophone at the end, which ends the album, and it's almost to illustrate all good things come to an end. It sounds like the miserable last song you hear at a bar when they turn the lights on and tell you to go home. It's time to face the hangover or the comedown or whatever else, so everything's there for a reason. Not one thing is there to be weird or kooky. That probably doesn't give you any greater idea of what the record is like soundwise, but it shows you where we're coming from in approaching it.

With so much evolution having happened over the last few records and into this one, do you still see yourselves

as a metal band? "Happy Song" is the heaviest song on there, but is there actual metal on the record, or have you moved beyond that now?

I don't know. It depends on what you call metal. That's our roots, so to me it's always going to be in there, in the same way that Fall Out Boy isn't a pop punk band anymore, but you still hear their roots in there, and that's us. We've got no problem if people want to turn around and say, "Well, you're not a metal band anymore." That's absolutely fine. It's where we came from and yeah, we've changed a lot, but that's always going to be in our blood. But, we've been doing this band for 10 years, and we've grown up a lot in that time. It's taste, some things are not palatable anymore, they don't register with us, and so it doesn't influence and inspire us in the same way. I know we're going to get a lot of flak with people saying we've sold out and whatever, but it would be selling out if we were still trying to write songs that sounded like our old music, because it's just not us. We wouldn't be able to do it. It would be trying to replicate something that we don't know how to do anymore, and if anyone asks us what kind of music we are I wouldn't say metal myself, but I guess it's up to other people to classify us however they want to.

Do you think there's anything on *That's the Spirit* that might come as such a surprise to people it's going to take a few spins to get their heads around it?

Every song is so different, not one song on the album sounds like any other, and because of that it might be hard to really get it at first. I mean, the first track on the album is a mindfuck. I think you probably won't appreciate it until the second chorus comes around, and then you'll want to listen to it again. It's a lot deeper than anything we've written before, so it does take a few listens. And, at the risk of blowing smoke up our own asses, each song is so catchy that whatever song you listen to last, that's the one that will be in your head. But yeah, it's not going to be familiar to anyone. People think they know what to expect, and they don't. Obviously "Throne" has that Linkin Park influence, and "Happy Song" is a heavy song. Anyone who thinks they have the record sussed from having heard those two songs really has no idea.

It's quite ballsy starting the record with a mindfuck. Was that always the plan, a case of we're definitely putting this first so we hit people straight out of the gate?

It was uncertain at times, but I think we all wanted it to be the opener straight away. It was the first song we wrote and the last that we finished. It is so different to anything we've ever done before, and in that respect we had this amazing instrumental, but it was so difficult for me to do anything over it, because I've never had to sing over anything like that before. The chorus is big, but it's slow, and the verses

sound like 90s trance music. It's just a weird mix, and as good as it was instrumentally, we nearly scrapped it because it was so hard for me to contribute my parts. I think it's everyone in the band's favorite song. We wanted to make it pretty clear from the moment you put the record on that this is not *Sempiternal*. It isn't like anything you've heard from us before. We wanted to write a good album that's going to do well commercially, but we also wanted to write music that we could respect and love ourselves, and opening with something like that really lets us know that we've done that.

As you mentioned, you self-produced the record. Were you confident that you could do it yourselves going into it?

We're never too confident. There's always that fear, but we did "Drown" ourselves and that worked out well. No disrespect to anyone we've worked with before, but for us, working with other people is always going to mean a compromise. We know what we want. We worked on *That's the Spirit* for four months before we even entered a studio, five days a week from morning until night, and we produced the fuck out of the record. We didn't need someone else coming in and saying, "Well, why don't you change this for that?" It's not going to sit well for us, and we know how we want it to sound. We know how we want the drums to sound, we know the guitar tones we want, so we don't need anyone. We just knew it would be better if we did it ourselves.

You tracked the record at a studio on the Greek island of Santorini. Why did you choose to go there?

Our bassist Googled the best studios in the world, and that was one that came up, simple as that. We've usually recorded records on industrial estates, and we'd already been stuck in my house for those four months demoing it. It was like the payoff to go record there. Obviously, because we weren't working with any big name producers, we had extra money to play around with, and it was an awesome experience. It couldn't have been any more chill. There's always a level of hard work that comes with it, and we had written most of the album, but there were still verses that needed working on. And, of course, the first song still needed both lyrics and vocal patterns figured out, and that took us ages. But whatever brick walls we hit, there were no big dramas. Matt [Nicholls] was doing his drum takes in two hours, while usually that can take two days when you have producers in there, and burning through stuff like that felt really good and gave us the time for those final bits of writing. We had a nice big swimming pool outside, too, so when we needed to chill and cool out, it was great. It really was like being on vacation.

Considering how stressful the experience of making *There Is a Hell...* was for you, it couldn't really be more different. Yeah, totally! Another thing we did differently to anything

"THIS TIME, EVERY SOUND, EVERY LYRIC, EVERY THEME, IT'S ALL CONNECTED. EACH SONG IS A LOT MORE VISUAL"





"EVERYTHING GOT US TO WHERE WE ARE, AND WE COULDN'T BE IN A BETTER PLACE."

we had done before was that rather than going instrument by instrument we went track by track. So, instead of Matt doing all the drum parts, then the bass and guitar parts got laid down, and finally my vocals, Matt could do his drums for the one track, the guitar and bass parts and vocal parts could pretty much be done at the same time, and that meant no one was standing around for weeks on end after they had done their part. It also meant that each song got our undivided attention, no one was burning out, and you find yourself asking, "Why did we ever do it another way? Why did we wait until the last week and then I have to cane all my vocals out?" Because obviously that's going to result in me losing my voice a lot of the time.

You mentioned there's saxophone on the last track. Are there other musicians on the record, or is it mostly you guys?

There's a lot of strings and orchestral parts, which is something that over the last few records has become something of a staple for us. It adds another layer. It's not there for the sake of it. There's a harp in there, and me and Jordan played around a lot with synth parts. There's a lot of stuff on there we've never really done before, like a lot of the solos have a bit more swagger, vocally, too, and lyrically there's a lot of stuff that wouldn't have made sense on *Sempiternal* or any

time before that. It's a lot more humorous.

Were you pushing yourself vocally to expand on what you did on the last record? Definitely. I always want to be twice as good as I actually am, and then trying to figure out how to do that is quite a bastard (laughs).

There's falsetto stuff, and a lot of stuff that I never dared do before. The melodies are a lot more intricate, too. On *Sempiternal*, you could play the melodies out on a keyboard, but this time there are a lot more flourishes, a lot more going up and down the scales, which was a real challenge for me.

When you were tracking, were you thinking about how you would pull it off live, or did you just figure you'd worry about it later?

It was a bit of both. We never did anything that I couldn't do. My train of thought was if I can do it once I can do it again, I'll just have to figure it out. I actually had a singing teacher come over and work with me for two weeks, and she was amazing. She taught me so much, which was a massive help. I think the position I'm in now is good, because even with the *Sempiternal* tracks live I could get away a bit more with screaming if my voice was struggling a bit, but this time there's no hiding behind it. There are so many clean parts, so many things will just sound downright awful if they're not done right, so I'm rehearsing and practicing every single day, because it's got to be good when

we start playing the songs every night.

With the last record, you went through the unenviable situation of it leaking months in advance, but you managed to use that to your advantage, which contributed to more people buying it. It's unlikely that would work again, so were you trying to avoid a repeat of that?

Oh yeah, and we've done a lot to that end. We've been a bit over-the-top about it really, but I hope people will forgive us for that given our experience. This time it was a case of nobody's fucking having it before it comes out! Our label and management were saying to us, "Okay, we need to get the record from you so we can give it to this magazine or for that purpose," and we were like, "No, we don't care. You're not having it." They said, "You won't get any advance reviews if you don't," and again we said, "We don't care. We'd rather not have reviews than have it leak." We just didn't trust anyone, and in the end what we did was got three iPod nanos, gave one to each of our managers and one to the label, and they're not allowed to let them out of their sight, so if someone wants to review it they have to go to them and listen to it in their presence. It's not because we think we're some massive band and we can do what we want and not care if people think we're being dicks about it. It's because we just want this to happen the

right way. At the same time, if we can get within two weeks of its release date without it leaking, but then it does, I'll be happy with that. Usually at the point it starts getting pressed into physical copies it's going to get out there, that's just the way it is, but when it drops months in advance, that can be pretty crushing. In fact, we were so intent on keeping it under wraps, no one even knew we were releasing an album at all until about two months before it came out. It was like we had snuck off and did it behind everyone's backs, but that just made us more secure in what we were doing.

Looking back over your career, are there things you wish you had done differently, or does being in the position you are in now make all the downs you have experienced worth it?

There are things you might regret or wish you did differently, but yeah, everything got us to where we are, and we couldn't be in a better place. One side of me says, "Yeah, I wish I had never become a drug addict," which is a problem I've now dealt with and isn't a problem anymore, and yeah, I can look back on that experience negatively, obviously. Or, I can look around and see where I am now and know that this is better than I could have ever expected things to be.

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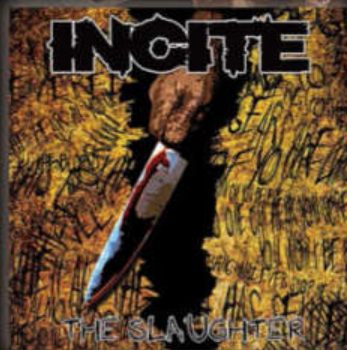
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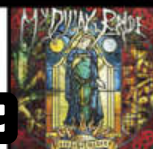
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MY DYING BRIDE

Feel the Misery
PEACEVILLE



9

DEATH DOOM LEGENDS: The name My Dying Bride is synonymous with doom greatness. One of the Peaceville three (along with Paradise Lost and Anathema), this band has laid a foundation of pain and misery over their more than two decades together, and here in 2015, they're still making bone crushing, vital documents. *Feel the Misery*, the band's 12th studio album, harkens back to their earlier days more than anything else they've put out for the last decade, and it's a great record that should please gray hairs and newcomers alike. The band puts together 62 compelling minutes, and they sound as healthy and vital as ever before. Aaron Stainthorpe is in amazing voice, stretching his singing to the darkest corners of his mind and delivering growls when the need arises. The rest of the band retains their death doom throne with zero question, and this record gets better with every listen. Morose opener "And My Father Left Forever" will put a pall over your heart, as the tragic tale pours forth. From there, it only gets darker, from grisly "To Shiver in Empty Halls," to the sweltering title track (good luck getting the chorus out of your head), to ultra dark "I Celebrate Your Skin," to epic closer "Within a Sleeping Forest." This band is as important today as in their original days, and *Feel the Misery* is a triumph through and through. ~ Brian Krasman

METAL ALLEGIANCE

NUCLEAR BLAST



ALL-STAR METAL: The core of Metal Allegiance is made up of Testament's Alex Skolnick (guitar), Megadeth's David Ellefson (bass), and Winer Dogs' Mike Portnoy (drums), while many guest vocalists and guitarists play their parts well. Opening track "Gift of Pain" lets the listener know right away that they're in for something special, as Lamb of God's Randy Blythe is at his commanding best. "Let Darkness Fall" is an epic, seven minute track featuring Mastodon's Troy Sanders, who gives it a Testament meets Mastodon vibe. Phil Anselmo's menacing drawl on "Dying Song" shares similarities to what he did on Pantera's "Cemetery Gates." Closer "Pledge of Allegiance" embodies the spirit of metal with full force as Death Angel's Mark Osegueda nails it, while "Can't Kill the Devil" sees Testament's Chuck Billy at his usual best. Osegueda's distinctive drawl combined with Lacuna Coil vocalist Cristina Scabbia's melodic voice on "Scars" adds an innovative dynamic to the aggression. The three part instrumental "Triangulum (I. Creation II. Evolution III. Destruction)" not only gives Skolnick a platform to show off, it allows the stellar guest guitarists a chance to shine as well. With supergroups popping up all over the place, an all-star collaboration such as Metal Allegiance is more than welcomed. ~ Kelley Simms



TOM COUTURE

AGUSA Agusa 2 (Två)

LASER'S EDGE

9



PSYCHEDELIC ROCK: There is very little, if anything, that indicates *Agusa 2 (Två)* is a product of the 21st century outside of its release date. It consists of two tracks each the length of album sides, the instruments are all vintage, and the production analog (or at least has that warm feel to it). Still, this isn't some long-lost 60s/70s classic getting the reissue treatment. These Swedes hail from the here and now. Whatever the temporal origin, we should be happy to have them. Their debut, *Högtid*, showed promise, but this time around their brand of (mostly) instrumental psychedelic prog rock has really come into its own. They've added a flutist, as every band of this style should have, and it turns out that was one of the missing pieces. It helps tie the compositions together, giving them a folksy feel. Beyond the delightful piping, each track has its own identity. "Ganglat Fran Vintergatan" feels almost like something a jam band like Widespread Panic would do if jam bands weren't insufferable. "Kung Bores Dans" has an early Pink Floyd vibe, and that's a good vibe to have. Both songs have a sense of fun and discovery to them that helps carry them through the 20 minute run times without ever feeling tedious. Plus, these folks can play. It's anachronistic, sure, but who cares when the music is this good? ~ Jeff Treppel

VARIOUS ARTISTS Alleluia! The Devil's Carnival

CLEOPATRA

10



VAUDEVILLIAN ROCK OPERA: In 2012, director Darren Lynn Bousman and writer Terrance Zdunich released *The Devil's Carnival*, a horror musical pitting Heaven against Hell, featuring the musical offerings of eclectic talents like Skinny Puppy's Nivek Ogre, Five Finger Death Punch's Ivan Moody, and Emilie Autumn. *Alleluia!*, the second installment, takes all of the best parts of the original soundtrack and expands on them, creating a truly surreal experience. Real-life spouses Chantal Claret and Jimmy Urine join forces on the spectacularly old-time "Good Little Dictation Machines," while none other than David Hasselhoff croons away on "Only by Design." Elsewhere, veteran actor Paul Sorvino belts it out on more operatic tracks like "Cloud Serenade" and "Bells of the Black Sunday," and Rent's Adam Pascal lends his Broadway honed talents to "Songs of Old." However, of all people, it may just be Tech N9ne that takes the cake, infusing "Hitting on All Sevens" with just enough of a rough edge to elevate it to scene stealer status. Zdunich has proven himself a masterful songwriter, both in 2008's *Repo! The Genetic Opera* and the original *Carnival*, and *Alleluia!* is no different, a swingin' throwback to the Roaring Twenties with a devilish twist that's impossible to get enough of. ~ Tyler Davidson

ALOKE Alive

THE END

7



ALT-ROCK: Prior to the formation of alt-rock outfit Grouplove, vocalist/guitarist Christian Zucconi spent five years tearing up the NYC indie scene with post-hardcore rockers Alope. In fact, it was upon the ashes of Alope that Zucconi built Grouplove when they scored an early hit with a version of Alope's "Colors

You Have," which appeared as "Colours" on Grouplove's debut, *Never Trust a Happy Song*. Disbanding in 2009 after a trio of EPs and a full-length live album titled *One Day We Will Kill You*, Alope has returned to action with *Alive*. Featuring a collection of tunes that date back to Alope's 2004 inception, *Alive* is a no-frills, all natural exercise in indie/alt-rock excess, peppered with healthy doses of energized pop punk. Recorded by Steve Albini, *Alive* boasts an organic and raw production that harkens back to 90s garage rock and grunge. This approach gives *Alive* an energy that makes this as genuine sounding an album as you'll hear in the age of MacBooks and Auto-Tune. While the tonal throwback works well, *Alive* suffers from a lack of cohesion. Granted, these songs were written at various points in the lives of Zucconi and his cohorts, but the album's disjointed structure is obvious. That complaint aside, *Alive* is a welcome reintroduction to a band you wish you'd heard of a decade ago.

~ Ryan Ogle

AMORPHIS Under the Red Cloud

NUCLEAR BLAST

9



MASTERFUL MELODIC METAL: If Finland's Amorphis is one thing, it's consistent. If Finland's Amorphis is a dozen things, it's consistently releasing thoughtful melodic death metal albums tinged with prog and folk. Amorphis' 12th album, *Under the Red Cloud*, is exactly what you're expecting—grandiose, well arranged songs with immediate hooks atop a bed of instrumentation. Tomi Joustén's versatile vocals continue to be Amorphis' obvious strong suit. His gravely growls and beautiful clean singing catapult dark, expansive songs into soaring anthems. Amorphis' secret weapon, though, is keyboard work by Santeri Kallio. His lines are powerful enough to cut through the mix but restrained and tasteful enough to avoid swerving into cheese territory. The vocals and keyboards would be irrelevant were it not for the lithe guitar of founding members Esa Holopainen and Tomi Koivusaari. Even with everything going on in the mix, this is still guitar driven rock, after all. Two of the standout tracks are "Death of a King" and "Sacrifice," both of which are mid album apexes. It's great to hear a band releasing such amazing music 25 years into the fray. *Under the Red Cloud* may not be the best Amorphis album, but it's one of the best and certainly one of the best melodic or progressive metal albums you'll hear all year. ~ Nick DeMarino

ANNIHILATOR Suicide Society

UOR

8



THRASH GROOVE METAL: Canadian thrash groove metal legend Annihilator is well into its 31st year of existence. Jeff Waters, the band's original architect since its 1984 inception, is a one-man show on its 15th full-length album, *Suicide Society*. Waters handles all songwriting, plays all guitar and bass, engineers, produces, mixes and masters. Waters also returns to manning lead vocals, as he did on the critically acclaimed *King of the Kill* (1994). Although there's been hit or miss Annihilator albums over the years, 2013's *Feast* was almost a full throttle, return to form Annihilator album. The opening title track here possesses a swaggering groove-laden riff and a chantable, anthemic chorus with lyrics about how disgusting the human race has become. "My Revenge" is loaded with Metallica-isms, right down to its

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ADAM MURRAY

INTRONAUT
The Direction
of Last Things
CENTURY MEDIA

10



PROG METAL PERFECTION: If Intronaut was on your shit list for wading too deep into melodic, jazz slick waters on *Valley of Smoke* and *Habitual Levitations (Instilling Words with Tones)*, then *The Direction of Last Things* is the big payoff. Intronaut's fifth album makes good on the heavy promise of 2008's *Prehistoricisms* without ignoring their growth on the intervening albums. Joe Lester's bass remains creative and engaging, Danny Walker's drums are as sharp and nuanced as ever, and Sacha Dunable pulls off good cop/bad cop vocals without resorting to the scream by numbers formula. Intronaut's real achievement on *The Direction of Last Things*, though, is the guitar work and songwriting by Dunable and Dave Timnick. They'll indulge a good melody for a tick then snap right back into sharp, angular attacks only to reveal a shimmering bridge or snappy section. Standouts include the dynamic "Digital Gerrymandering," the Yes worship of "The Unlikely Event of a Water Landing," and the time signature gymnastics of "Sul Ponticello." Remember Cynic's comeback *Traced in Air*? *The Direction of Last Things* is that good. Remember Cynic's follow-up, *Kindly Bent to Free Us*? Thankfully, Intronaut didn't retrace that overindulgent tangent, and *The Direction of Last Things* offers the best of what Intronaut has to offer. ~ Nick DeMarino

aggressive palm muted downstroked riffs and Waters' Hetfield-esque vocals. However, "Snap" takes a more commercial approach with a harmonious a cappella intro, which is soon followed by a lurching riff. The familiar sounding "Creepin' Again," with its blistering pace, jackhammer rhythm, menacing riffing, and catchy vocal harmonies, walks the same path as the band's midperiod material. *Suicide Society* is a back to basics Annihilator album that most diehard fans should be pleased with. ~ Kelley Simms

release that never becomes cloying or playing to the band's established choir. This is a strong record that should go over like gangbusters with anyone that was anxiously awaiting Atreyu's return to the scene. ~ George Pacheco

Disorder" is quite wonderful in its downbeat way, while the textured throbbing surge of "Unhappy" demonstrates a real adeptness for knowing when less is definitely more. This also goes for the mostly acoustic "A Lesson in Loving," and they go all shouty, bolshie rock 'n' roll on the wonderfully belligerent "Interlude." "Spinning" is maybe a little too reminiscent of the Pixies, but it almost doesn't matter given how engaging it is, and the warmth and slightly off-kilter lushness of closer "Myself in a Pill" makes for a sublime end to things. ~ Dan Slessor

and Ross Burnett's drumming is beastly. No matter the speed, his execution is on point and proves how talented each of these musicians are. *Terms of Surrender* is a must for thrash maniacs and will propel these guys to the top in no time. ~ Jeffrey Allee

ATREYU
Long Live
SPINEFARM

9

WISE RETURN: *Long Live* represents a triumphant return for influential Orange County rockers Atreyu, whose work back in the early to mid millennium served as a blueprint for many emo/metal acts. Atreyu fans realize that the band always got a bit heavier with each release, with their last two albums—2007's *Lead Sails Paper Anchor* and 2009's *Congregation of the Damned*—strongly showcasing the more metallic and extreme ends of their sound. *Long Live* continues down that path with even more determination, blazing a very similar trail to their Swedish counterparts In Flames, bettering them with a pedal to the metal attack full of urgency and energy. "Live to Labor" and the opening title track make no bones about the fact that Atreyu isn't mucking around one bit here, as downtuned yet catchy riffing smashes against the dual vocal attack of frontman Alex Varkatzas and drummer/clean singer Brandon Saller. *Long Live* is the result of a group coming back to work after six years apart, with all of the wisdom that comes with age. That wisdom has served Atreyu well, as *Long Live* is a thoughtful



BETTER OFF
Milk
EQUAL VISION

8

ALT-ROCK: For their sophomore full-length, Nashville's Better Off returns with *Saves the Day's* Arun Bali handling production duties, and he clearly gets where the band is coming from. Though a few too many songs on the first half of *Milk* are overly formulaic, they just about get away with this, and otherwise there are some great songs here. Even when they maybe don't fully realize what they're aiming for, they get an A for effort, and their songwriting really is blossoming into something special. The second half of the album is the far better of the two, spending most of the time away from the gentle verse/big chorus dynamic, and they're at their best when they step away from the path most comfortable to them. The brooding, almost somnambulant trudge of "Bella

BLACK FAST
Terms of Surrender
EONE

9

HELL-RAISING PROGRESSIVE THRASH METAL:

Progressive black thrashers Black Fast can easily be described as one of the best acts to appear on the scene in recent years. After their successful independently released debut, *Starving Out the Light*, Black Fast returns with its second full-length record, *Terms of Surrender*, which kicks it up a notch and brings together a surplus of influences familiar to fans of the subgenre. Aaron Akin has an unrelenting black metal presence with his coarse vocals that run throughout *Terms of Surrender*. Blackened riffs are also present, with Trevor Johanson playing guitar alongside Akin, and are thrown together with technical compositions and the straightforward approach many fans will appreciate. Black Fast shows its songwriting prowess on *Terms of Surrender* with each track differentiating from one another without straying from the band's rooted sound. Ryan Thompson supplies intricate bass that contrasts well with the rest of the band without taking attention away from the group as a whole,

BLACK TONGUE
The Unconquerable
Dark
CENTURY MEDIA

5



DOOMCORE: Black Tongue almost has it. In fact, with "Plague Worship," the track kicking off its second album, it seems like the band is on to something. There is harrowing sludge accenting the molasses paced metalcore. An air of dread permeating the obscenely downtuned guitars and grizzly bear growls. Sure, there are breakdowns—of course, there are breakdowns—and, as par for most courses, they are elastic and lack dimensionality, but for one hot minute it really seems like the band discovered how to make the texture-less scourge and repetitive quarter-note/eighth-note rape and pillage bearable, if not interesting, via the addition of gritty, pitch-black sludge. As soon as our hopes are up, the band drops them from the top of Mt. Ranier with the next song, "In the Wake of the Wolf," an exercise in linear ennui that hails the over-processed, preset thug 'n' chug of Lorna Shore, Carnifex, and The Acacia Strain and even incorporates clean bits to further shine debilitating light on where there was, and should have remained, isolating murk. There are moments the band regains some whittled away confidence—the occasional eerie intro, a riff or two that remind of Will Haven—but overall, Black Tongue seems content to be stuck in emulation mode on *The Unconquerable Dark* as opposed to truly going out on a limb. ~ Kevin Stewart-Panko

BLESSTHEFALL To Those Left Behind

FEARLESS

8

MELODIC METALCORE: *To Those Left Behind* is just what you have come to expect from Blessthefall, and there's nothing wrong with that. It may not be as furiously intense as 2013's *Hollow Bodies*, but it does a great job in balancing the brutal and melodic. This isn't one of those records that will called the heaviest or the softest a band has ever written, because it falls somewhere in between it all. As a result, there's a little bit of everything to keep your attention on *To Those Left Behind*. The opening track, "Decayer," is fueled by some vicious and thematic structures, coupled with a flowing chorus that easily sticks with the listener long after the song has come to an end, and its not the only option on the record to penetrate in such a way. "Walk on Water" features explosively energetic and emotional singing, "Against the Waves" is theatrically engaging and impressive throughout, and "Condition // Comatose" expands upon the band's formula with its atmospheric keys and haunting vocals. The album closes strong with "Departures," a song that dips and leaps without falter. *To Those Left Behind* may not cause a revolution within the scene, but it does abundantly demonstrate the continued excellence of Blessthefall. This is a prime example of metalcore, so fans of the genre should respond positively. ~ *Nathaniel Lay*

relentlessly brutal and utterly compelling. Keeping things lean and mean (the longest song clocking in at 3:12), they deliver maximum devastation with every blow. Whether hurling scathing salvos of blastbeat horror or locking into truly hideous grooves—the best of these driving "Hell" and "Cries of the Dead"—they are gripping, not exactly reinventing any wheels but visceral in the extreme. By the time closer "Hate" lumbers into the fray, they have yet to pause for breath, and they make sure they wrap things up in similar fashion. The record is further enlivened by the shredding on display, which is dispensed sparingly, and no solos stick around long enough to get too wanky. Moreover, those potentially turned off by the thematic material need not necessarily shy away, for in keeping with genre tradition, 95 percent of the lyrics are totally indiscernible due to the manner in which they are vomited up, and it would be a shame to ignore the record unjustly. ~ *Dan Slessor*

BUCKCHERRY Rock N Roll

F-BOMB

7

MIDLIFE REBELLION: Some may scoff at *Rock N Roll* as the title of Buckcherry's seventh studio album, deeming it presumptuous. Others will find fault with the juvenile naming of the band's own label, F-Bomb Records, and others still the puerile nature of the lyrics. And all of them would not only be missing the point, but would find a band—the same that named its previous EP *Fuck*—that couldn't possibly care less. This is rock 'n' roll, and from the sound of another raucous round of catchy, if sometimes staid, Buckcherry strut, they like it. Though not as fresh and brimming with the creative energy of 2013's *Confessions*, the new album is loudly and proudly Buckcherry and devoid of any disappointment risk for fans. The highlights hit early with album openers "Bring It on Back" and "Tight Pants," the former deserving of its single status as an overt nod to melodic familiarity, the latter a real booty shaker that benefits from a rousing horn section. With songs like the subtly destroying "Wood" and the radio commerciality of "Wish to Carry on," surprises are nonexistent and predictability reigns throughout *Rock N Roll*. That's not a bad thing, especially for the loyalists, even if *Rock N Roll* won't serve as a tool of conversion for anyone that only knows the band for super hits "Lit Up" and "Crazy Bitch" and still don't care. ~ *Scott Alisnglu*

BURIED IN VERONA Vultures Above, Lions Below

RISE

6

DEFIANT METAL: Buried in Verona has taken a leap forward with their latest record, *Vultures Above, Lions Below*. Prior to its recording, the band faced daunting challenges that almost destroyed them. The two remaining members—Brett Anderson (vocals) and Richie Newman (guitar)—recruited fresh blood and prepared to write, produce, and record the most honest collection of their career. The result is not only successful in this regard, but also nearly as inspiring and refreshing as *Sempiternal* was for Bring Me the Horizon. Songs like "Vultures Above," "Hurricane," "Can't Be Unsaid," and "Done for Good" best show the band's growth, with powerful lyrics, large instrumentation, and impressive structures. This isn't to say that the old school Buried in Verona is gone without a trace, however. "Extraction," "Dig Me Out," and "Separation" all mirror the band's

BROKEN FLESH LUXOR

9

BRUTAL DEATH METAL: If there's one band that proves you can be skull fucking heavy and still push a Christian agenda to the forefront, it's Oklahoma's Broken Flesh. Having weathered a few lineup changes over the years, it seems like the winning combination has come together for their self-titled third full-length, which is

WINDHAND



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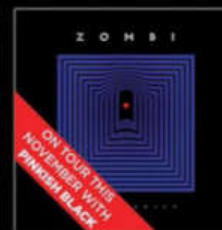


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DIAMONDS
Never Wanna Die
NAPALM



8

PUNCHY ROCK 'N' ROLL: Toronto hard rockers Diamonds, led by firecracker of a female vocalist Priya Panda, has been forging a name for itself on the Canadian rock touring circuit since 2006. On its third full-length, *Never Wanna Die*, the band plays a hard hitting, American streetwise rock 'n' roll style in the vein of Guns N' Roses, Halestorm, Sister Sin, and Mötley Crüe. The 10 raucous anthems conjure up glorious images of long haired, metal t-shirt wearing teens shotgunning cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon while simultaneously inhaling monstrous bong hits. Closer "Save Your Life" captures this attitude, catering to the outcasts and misfits in the best way possible ...through rock 'n' roll! The opening title track is a sleaze rock/glam manifesto decorated with a punky attitude and a huge, hooky chorus. It's slightly commercial and poppy, but with just the right amount of badass rock 'n' roll attitude. The fabulously titled "Hell Is Full" is a raucous romper of bravado and a chantable chorus. The salacious "Secret" sees Panda conjuring up iconic vocal harmonies in the vein of Pat Benatar, while "Better Off Dead" contains one hell of a refrain after the chorus, which will incite a rowdy sing-along throughout concert halls everywhere. *Never Wanna Die* is a call to arms for the rock 'n' roll faithful. ~ Kelley Simms



NICPOULIOT

previous outings with overflowing aggression and pulsing rage. Despite the debris that had been laid before the band, the dynamic of the group has expanded and propelled in a very promising way. Each rotation of *Vultures Above, Lions Below* only intensifies the strong points of the record, making it all the more memorable and lasting in the long run. It's with great anticipation that fans should look forward to what comes next from Buried in Verona.

~ Nathaniel Lay

BURN HALO
Wolves of War
EONE



7

HARD RAWK: It's been quiet on the Burn Halo front for a while, their last release 2011's *Up from the Ashes*. Diehards eagerly awaiting James Hart and Co.'s return have plenty of reason to be happy, for *Wolves of War* picks up where its predecessor left off. Yep, evolution is not a priority on *Wolves of War*, but then why should it be when you do kind of sleazy but very shiny anthemic radio rock the way this Orange County crew does? As such, anyone who found their previous releases somewhat cheesy will find more of the same on *Wolves of War*, and there are certainly moments that are a little funnier than they were supposed to be, but these are highly outweighed by the gigantic choruses and wealth of massive hooks and sassy grooves. The title track, "Novocaine," and "Until the End" are solid, Avenged Sevenfold-esque uptempo stompers, helped greatly by the amount of swagger thrown in, nicely harking back to the glory days of the Sunset Strip. Better though are the likes of the subtly titled "Fuck You," which really will make a fine soundtrack to picking fights, the thunderous judder of "Enemy Inside," the nearly eight minutes of closer "You Are the Damned," which is suitably epic, and the lighters aloft grandeur of "Out of Faith." It ain't clever, but it's definitely big, and a lot of fun. ~ Dan Slessor

CELLOWELLER
End of an Empire
FXT



8

ELECTRO INDUSTRIAL: Electro industrial musician and production guru Klayton is back for another interstellar voyage at the helm of Celdweller. *End of an Empire*—his third or fifth album, depending whether you count the instrumentals—was originally released as a series of EPs, like most of his oeuvre. It's long, indulgent, and quite good. More than half the songs approach or exceed seven minutes in length, so there's a lot of chorus revisitations plus breakdowns and breakthroughs. The keys carry the weight of the leads, while guitars offer jagged, supportive attacks. The obvious comparison is to a pop oriented KMFDM, though with much glossier production and dub step influence. Klayton's vocals remain Celdweller's best aspect. In terms of melody and range, he sounds like Trent Reznor if he took vocal lessons from Peter Gabriel. In terms of lyrics, Celdweller explores science fiction but actually focuses on emotional and existential quandaries. At the goofy end of the spectrum, the homophone "Heart On" is either really funny or puerile—actually, it's both. The obvious single candidate is the burner "Good Luck (You're Fucked)," though any of the epic tracks could qualify. There's plenty of great material on *End of an Empire*, but it demands time and attention.

~ Nick DeMarino

CHILDREN OF BODOM
I Worship Chaos
NUCLEAR BLAST



8

SCYTHE SWINGIN' CERTAINTY: After *Halo of Blood*, Children of Bodom's 2013 triumphant return to form, Finland's favorite melodic death metal band had a couple of options. They could have continued dipping back into the sound of their celebrated albums (*Hatebreeder*, *Follow the Reaper*) or they could have retread the thrashed battleground of their more recent (and widely panned) material. Wait a minute—that's not a choice at all, is it? Unsurprisingly, Children of Bodom's ninth album, *I Worship Chaos*, is a natural progression of *Halo of Blood* and, by extension, their earlier material. Fun, rapid-fire riffs weave in and out of limber guitar and keyboard solos, harsh, raspy vocals provide enough melody to carry choruses, and power metal is a welcome flavor not a primary mode of expression. As expected, guitarist/vocalist Alexi Laiho and keyboardist Janne Wirman dovetail miraculous solo into miraculous solo. The big ballad, "Prayer for the Afflicted," feels a bit out of place between the burner "Horns" and the big bad title track, but its internal dynamics are powerful enough to carry the day. Atmospheric elements soak the album at times, but don't drown out the band's central sound. Children of Bodom may be playing it safe on *I Worship Chaos*, but that's not such a bad thing. ~ Nick DeMarino



CHRISTIAN MISTRESS
To Your Death
RELAPSE



9

CLASSIC METAL: There aren't many reasons not to like Christian Mistress. Inspired by the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and the grimmer side of the *Headbangers Ball* scene (more Dokken and Scorpions bite than Poison fluff), they sling sweet riffs like nobody's business. Top that off with Christine Davis' husky piping, and you have a pretty clear winner. *To Your Death*, their second full-length, steps away from the occult incantations of 2012's *Possession* (although Lucifer still makes a few appearances), instead opting for a more straightforward rock attack. No complaints. Guitarists Oscar Sparbel and newcomer Tim Diedrich get the opportunity to indulge in Iron Maiden/Judas Priest dual guitar heroics on songs like "No Place" and "Stronger Than Blood." The Iron Maiden comparison is certainly bolstered by Jonny Wulf's galloping bass. Their love for 80s metal shines through, and they have the songwriting chops to back it up. Lots of sections feel like nods to the songs of the era (the opening of "Neon" has a definite "Rock You Like a Hurricane" vibe), but it plays as a respectful homage in the midst of their own killer tunes. While *To Your Death* may not be anything groundbreaking, it proves that great songs can carry a band a long way. It feels timeless, not out of date. As long as it makes your ears happy, who cares? ~ Jeff Treppel

DARK BUDDHA RISING

Inversum
NEUROT

8



SIT DOWN IN YOUR HOUSE: Are you at home? Great. You completed step one. Now go to a dark room and clear your mind of everything. We will wait. Okay, now put on the new record from Dark Buddha Rising called *Inversum* and trance out. If you're fully committed, and only a fool wouldn't be for this Finnish group, you will submit mind, body, and soul to what awaits you on the two epic mind journeys on *Inversum* that sound far more inviting than they do intimidating. This is Dark Buddha Rising's sixth full-length offering, and the band sounds like they are creating a spiritual and emotional experience that you just can't fake. They sound dialed in and completely invested, sold spiritually and emotionally to what they're doing. Maybe some listeners will feel they're going a little too hippie here, but so what? This record is ideal for when you want to sit down in the dark, let your senses go, and allow spiritual forces to overcome you and carry you into the beyond. These two tracks—"ESO" and "EXO"—rumble and sprawl over their running time, messing with your brain and causing you to see the cosmos in a totally different way. It helps if you're just sitting by yourself and looking for a trip. This is not party music. *Inversum* is for your soul when you need to branch out. ~ *Brian Krasman*

DARK SERMON

The Oracle
EONE / GOOD FIGHT

8



SINGED UNDEAD: On sophomore album, *The Oracle*, Tampa's Dark Sermon sharpens its blackened death metal sound while widening its palate to include post-metal sensibilities. When it works well—"In Each Hand, A Talisman" and "Children of Gaia"—it slays. In the same way that their 2013 debut, *In Tongues*, garnered reviews littered with the words "promising" and "potential," much of *The Oracle* suggests that Dark Sermon has a masterpiece waiting to be written. Some of the material here, however, isn't as amenable to dooier, more atmospheric passages. The effect, in these cases, is harsh dynamics without an emotional baseline—there are two sets of songs that could be named, but it really comes down to a matter of taste. Dark Sermon's twin Gothenburg style guitars still get some well deserved play and even the thrashier side of the band is indulged on "The Eyeless Needle." The singular relentlessness of "Rat King" shows the penchant for something like Swans' Cop. Then again, the shimmering "Both in Equal Parts" and grandiose "The Wraith" pretty much preclude that sharp of a turn. Dark Sermon is carving deeper into their niche and, years from now, *The Oracle* will be seen as a watershed moment. Its dynamics may be a tad confounding at first, but it's worth a place in your collection. ~ *Nick DeMarino*

DARKTHRONE

Black Death and Beyond
PEACEVILLE

10



GRIM COMPLETISM: *Black Death and Beyond* is much more than a retrospective compilation with the obligatory liner notes. It is a full-blown collector's box set that features three vinyl LPs containing material from across the band's catalog, each track painstakingly selected by

dynamic duo Gylve "Fenris" Nagell and Ted "Nocturno Culto" Skjellum. As if that weren't enough, also included is a beautiful hardcover book packed with band history and fantastic photos. From raw death metal beginnings to vintage Norwegian black metal to the material of the past several years, *Black Death and Beyond* is the sound of musical integrity and heavy metal dedication. A one sitting listening reveals more commonality than one might otherwise expect in terms of primal core values from a collection that includes Norwegian black metal purity (title track from 1993's *Under a Funeral Moon*), identity searching death metal primitivism (title track from 1991's *Soulside Journey*), crusty punkisms ("Graveyard Slut" from 2006's *The Cult Is Alive*), and blackened cult heavy metal ("I Am the Graves of the 80s" from 2010's *Circle the Wagons*). *Black Death and Beyond* is that rare example of a compilation that is deserving of the special descriptor used in the marketing write-up. It's also limited to 3,000 copies. The diehards would expect nothing less. ~ *Scott Alisoglu*

DEAD LETTER CIRCUS

Aesthesis
THE END

7



AMBIENT ALT-PROG: Despite recent lineup changes, *Aesthesis* sees Australian electro progressive rock unit Dead Letter Circus retaining the darkly emotive and ambient sound that has made the band among the Southern hemisphere's most celebrated young acts. The follow-up to 2013's *The Catalyst Fire*, *Aesthesis* overcomes that dreaded third album stigma by delivering dynamically structured and well penned tunes that boast the markings of a rapidly maturing band. This is an album driven by colossal choruses and ambient flourishes, but it's the little things that make *Aesthesis* worth diving into. Guitarists Clint Vincent and Luke Palmer take the band's riffing to the next level with a less is more approach that gives each of these 10 tracks plenty of space for singer Kim Benzie to interweave his melodious vocal hooks, introspective lyrics, and brooding croon. Less cluttered than previous releases, *Aesthesis* features a Radiohead-like vocal/musical interplay that works quite well. While the emotion feels genuine and backed by plenty of substance, the overall mood never really shifts gears. The cerebral sameness is the one thing that prevents *Aesthesis* from breaking out of its own shell. *Aesthesis* is an engaging and mostly rewarding experience, albeit one that forces Benzie's mood on the listener. ~ *Ryan Dgle*



DEAD LORD

Heads Held High
CENTURY MEDIA

8



THICK LIZZY: Blazing guitar solos and twin lead lines atop driving rock with rhythmic choruses? It's not hard to see why nearly every

description of the up-and-coming Dead Lord invokes Thin Lizzy. On *Heads Held High*, Dead Lord's first full-length, the Swedish band establishes itself as a latter-day purveyor of 70s hard rock. Thankfully, they're not just aping the sound or recreating it note for note. Dead Lord is best when they play to the heavier side of the spectrum. While highly accessible, *Heads Held High* has a dark, melancholic edge that evokes heaviness through bluesy atmosphere and minor melodic progressions. One of the problems with throwback bands is that they often churn out good songs, but fail to create quality singles that step out of the shadows of their forebears. However, songs like "Ruins," "Cold Hearted Madness," "The Bold Move," and the title track demonstrate that there's something special about Dead Lord. Missteps are few and far between. Even the jarring transition out of the solo section of "Strained Fools" is endearing. Lead guitarist and vocalist Hakim Krim doesn't just know how to write a good guitar lead, he delivers on the vocals as well. *Heads Held High* may be a tad too slavish to its inspirations, but it's dynamic and fulfilling. The hilarious cover doesn't hurt, either.

~ *Nick DeMarino*

THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

Space
RISE

8



CONCEPTUAL METALCORE: Cue muffled radio static, otherworldly sounds, and itching apprehension—*Space* is a theorized vision of the outer limits beyond one's knowledge of extraterrestrial life. In 2010, an EP surrounding the horror of a deadly apocalypse, titled *Zombie*, re-introduced Ohio metalcore outfit The Devil Wears Prada as innovative leaders that could produce contemporary content without compromising their sound. Five years later, the band releases a second EP brimming with fast paced rhythms, personal reflections, and a thirst for the unknown. "Planet A" initiates muted radio talk and celestial echoes, only to be overthrown by crashing drums and vicious screams. The desire to feed one's curiosity of the forthcoming unfolds within "Alien," where terror pours through descending guitar riffs and sound glitches. "Supernova" cohabits raging desire with oppressive loneliness in a thrash frenzied turmoil, as "Asteroid" directly ensues with frontman Mike Hranica screaming, "Say goodbye one last time as earth will be no more." The band is determined to stay true to its melodic hooks and metalcore roots, and with its diverse thematic nature and unique approach, *Space* justifies that they can successfully deliver fresh material without altering their sound or exploring genre crossovers.

~ *Danielle Deschamps*

EAT THE GUN

Howlinwood
STEAMHAMMER / SPV

7



CLOSE BUT NO BULLET: *Howlinwood* is a solid, catchy, perfectly competent and satisfying hard rock album with the misfortune of arriving on the heels of a blinding masterpiece. 2013's *Stripped to the Bone*, the fourth album from German trio Eat the Gun, was the band's first stunning achievement, an exhilarating blast of brilliance. Both raw and refined, spontaneous and delicately crafted, classic and modern, irreverent and heartfelt, the 10 tracks swept by in a lightning quick rush of rock 'n' roll glory, providing memorable entertainment for fans of all ages. Sadly, that kind of lightning never strikes twice, and this follow-up, laudable in

its aims and a stellar effort in its own right, fails to scale the staggering heights of its predecessor. The infectious hooks are there, embodied in the opening title track and such cuts as "Falling" and "Trouble Magnetic," but despite the inspired ballad-esque "Old Friend," much of this material lacks the punkish, unrestrained energy that gave *Stripped to the Bone* its charm, instead resembling a safer, textbook imitation of a modern rock flavor of the week ("How Does It Feel"). From any other band at any other time, *Howlinwood* might appear to be a superior product, but here it feels like a letdown, though admittedly, these songs will more than deliver live. ~ *Mike Smith*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Fat Music Vol. 8:
Going Nowhere Fat
FAT WRECK CHORDS

9



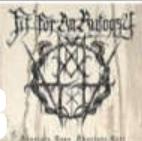
KILLER PUNK COMPILATION: It's totally appropriate that fan favorite Banner Pilot opens up the latest in Fat Wreck Chords' long-running series of label compilations, which they brought back to celebrate their 25th anniversary. *Fat Music Vol. 8: Going Nowhere Fat* is a testament to great music and to how the label is still doing such an amazing job after all these years. And how they do it is simple—they release good punk rock. Be it Masked Intruder's sugar sweet approach to pop punk, toyGuitar's unique near surf punk, or Less Than Jake's ska punk, it's all quality and it's all punk. The record label has more diversity to it than they did when they were releasing their first few compilations, and amazingly, it's still all great, even the ska/reggae stuff. This compilation features among its 25 tracks, just to name a few, Lagwagon, Strung Out, Good Riddance, Snuff, Bad Cop/Bad Cop, Mad Caddies, Get Dead, Cj Ramone, The Flatliners, Morning Glory, Old Man Markley, and Me First and the Gimme Gimmes. It's a great mixture of super punk bands new and old, and with unreleased tracks from NOFX, Night Birds, Pears, Swingin' Utters, Leftover Crack, and the awesome Western Addiction, this is a compilation worth owning, which makes sense. Fat Wreck Chords has always done compilations right. ~ *Greg Pratt*



FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY

Absolute Hope,
Absolute Hell
EONE / GOOD FIGHT

8



DEATHCORE: Taking the departure of vocalist Nate Johnson in stride, Fit for an Autopsy returns with their third full-length, and it's a beast. While their core sound remains intact and deathcore is still perhaps the most apt categorization, the record is far too textured, far too expansive to fit neatly under that heading. Incorporating aspects of atmospheric post-rock, there is so much depth to the 11 songs, and even when they're doing their damndest to fracture vertebrae with titanic stomping chuggery, there is something else behind the music, haunting and digging in under the skin.



EASTER DAILY

KNOCKOUT KID

Maniac
BULLET TOOTH

Knockout Kid

7

HAPPYCORE: Knockout Kid's *Maniac* offers high energy pop punk with hardcore tangents. The mix is ideal for fans of A Newfound Glory that like a little metal in the mix. The genre turnstile hopping is the pop punk version of post-hardcore's ever popular approach of a heavier than thou bassline with soaring choruses. Knockout Kid's execution is great in context, but a little odd in retrospect—if only because the band from Chicago can craft catchy, singsong choruses, but can't seem to write especially memorable heavy parts. "Handbook for the Recently Deceased" and "Legend of the Bare Knuckle Bronson" have some great guitar gymnastics, but you would be hard-pressed to hum anything other than the choruses. The big ballads, "No Words" and "Weight," eschew Knockout Kid's heavier leanings altogether, offering a different side of the band that, quite frankly, is certainly competent but nowhere near as interesting. Then again, the end of the closer, "Knife Fight in a Phone Booth," sounds more like a parody of a metalcore breakdown than an earnest execution. After a few listens through *Maniac*, you'll probably distill future listens to a subset of songs. Knockout Kid brings a lot to a table, but like a vegan pot luck, it's best to sample all the dishes before indulging in full portions. ~ Nick DeMarino

The opening title track lays this out, wielding gigantic riffs and rhythmic devastation, yet the tapped, coiling arpeggio that insinuates through it, alongside the corrosive squal, sets hairs on end. The lurching horror of "Murder in the First" is no less overpowering, its thick, muscular grooves, blasting and furious machine gun breakdown truly crushing, while "Ghosts in the River" sees them shut off the distortion—initially, anyway—and explore something far more understated yet agitated at the same time. New vocalist Joe Badolato is a revelation, his guttural bellow as powerful as his predecessor, but even when screaming bloody murder he is able to bring a more melodic element that really opens up the scope of the songs. ~ Dan Slessor

THE FLATLINERS

Division of Spoils
FAT WRECK CHORDS

7

MELODIC PUNK RARITIES: This Canadian melodic punk band has worked its way up to being one of Fat Wreck Chords' more beloved bands over a handful of albums, and *Division of Spoils* is a collection of rarities showing how they got there. And, man, this band has never been more on point than they were on their incredible *Monumental* EP, the two non-album tunes of which are on here in all their melodic punk glory ("Cut Your Teeth" and "Christ Punchers"). Songs like unreleased studio cuts "Lifers" and "Broken Men" are also top quality, showing this band's strengths well, those strengths laying somewhere between classic melodic skate punk and gruff 'n' tumble punk. At 70 minutes, the album definitely wears out its welcome, even if it is a good documentation of a decent band turning into a really great band. There's a bunch of songs

that don't make you stop what you're doing and take notice, like those amazing *Monumental* tunes, but that's the nature of these collections, which is why it may be recommended that only diehard fans take this particular plunge. But The Flatliners' cover of Tony Sly's "Fireball" is excellent and more than a little heartbreaking. It's good enough to make you ignore the awkward fact that, damn, these guys used to incorporate a lot more ska and reggae sounds into their tunes. ~ Greg Pratt



FOR TODAY

Wake
NUCLEAR BLAST

6

CHRISTIAN METAL: Unfortunately, it seems that For Today has run out of gas after years of forward progression. 2012's *Immortal* and 2014's *Fight the Silence* were especially powerful, but the band's latest endeavor, *Wake*, feels somewhat tired and generic. Their hardcore influences have almost dropped off the radar this time around, leaving mostly simplistic and un inventive breakdowns in the vein of a basement band just getting started. The ordinary style of *Wake* can be disheartening,

especially when you consider that the band's previous efforts were such successes. *Wake* almost feels like a collection of songs unearthed for the purpose of a B-sides and rarities release. That being said, the album does have its moments, or more accurately, flashes of potential. Memorable lyrics like, "The weak justify the actions of the weak / There is no answer in the cancer you speak" ("No Truth No Sacrifice") and, "I know you / There was a dream in your heart / I could see from the start / And it never came true" ("Deserter") are potent and commanding, but come too few and far between. "Bitter Roots" and "Hopeless Ambition" are also more on track toward grandeur, but ultimately *Wake* falls short too often to leave a lasting impression. It's the weakest release the band has had in recent memory as a result. ~ Nathaniel Lay

GET SCARED

Demons
FEARLESS

8

DARK POST-CORE: Swinging for the fences on *Demons*, Get Scared ensures every song on their third album is a bigger than life anthem. Vocalist Nicholas Matthews has always had a penchant for melody, but this time it's terminally important. One of Get Scared's strongest suits is suturing pop sections over heavy post-hardcore guitars and electro flourishes, and while their gothic image remains intact, the brash swagger of their debut is unaccounted for. *Demons* will largely be categorized as continued growth akin to their sophomore album, *Everyone's Out to Get Me*. Maturity, though, isn't everything it's cracked up to be. The seriousness here is a double-edged sword. It's a draining album that could have benefited from a few fun romps à la "Sarcasm" or

"Voodoo." *Demons* is heavily produced, but whether that's an asset or a deal breaker is a matter of taste. Take "The Devil's in the Details" and the closer "R.I.P." Both songs lean heavily on supporting keyboard sections that are potentially marred by the fact that Get Scared doesn't have a keyboardist. Thankfully, unlike a lot of the band's peers, the guitars aren't neutered. The opener, "Buried Alive," is as heavy as *Demons* gets, but there are plenty of returns to form, if only in spurts. Get Scared's *Demons* is a great, albeit singular album. ~ Nick DeMarino

GLORYHAMMER

Space 1992: Rise of the Chaos Wizards
NAPALM

9

ALL-POWERFUL METAL: Gloryhammer walks that fine line between amazing and really amazing. Is this pure power metal a parody of itself? Not exactly. Keyboardist and vocalist Christopher Bowes, better known from the helm of Alestorm, doesn't deal in tongue-in-cheek lines—he blows raspberries and French kisses. Gloryhammer dishes up absurdism not satire. *Space 1992: Rise of the Chaos Wizards*, Gloryhammer's second album, is a love letter to all things power metal. Excessive keyboard progressions and guitar solos, high-pitched vocals steeped in intergalactic fantasy, and epic songwriting are the marching orders of the day. Symphonic orchestration and choir backing vocals fill out the sound without overpowering the lead lines. The first half of *Space 1992: Rise of the Chaos Wizards* packs the biggest punch with the would-be Manowar anthem "Legend of the Astral Hammer" and the one-two ridiculousness of "Goblin King of the Darkstorm Galaxy" and "The Hollywood Hootsman." Nothing, though, compares to the combination

of the cinematic penultimate song "Apocalypse 1992" and ethereal closer "Dundax Aeterna." If it weren't obvious, the album's story involves alternate timelines and transdimensional realities. Gloryhammer may not be your thing, but you have to admit that some cheese is just plain delicious. ~ *Nick DeMarino*

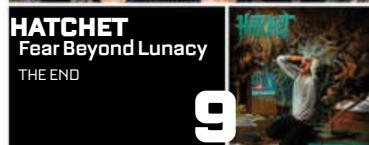


ESOTERIC POST-SOMETHING: Trying to fit The Great Tyrant into some neat little box only results in the banging of heads against walls. It is not that hard to break down the basic components comprising their sound on *The Trouble with Being Born*, but add them together and it's virtually impossible to categorize. Imagine Neurosis being fused with Nick Cave and a little Tom Waits, throw in some Zombi and perhaps a little Unsane with a Dead Rider meets Oneida chaser. Then shake well with elements more suited to show tunes, cabaret even, and you're still not quite all the way to grasping what this record yields. With two of the nine tracks on *The Trouble with Being Born* breaking the eight minute mark and two more getting close to it, they are not in a real hurry to get to where they're going, and you would be forgiven for thinking that they themselves often don't know their destination. While the subdued, tragic gloom of "Recounting Stars" and the urgent, almost desperate throb of the title track are quite immediate, much of the remainder of the record takes more investment, and there are no guarantees this will pay off. The often histrionic vocals frequently come off as trying a little too hard to be out there, and some songs go on too long, but you can't fault the ambition on display. ~ *Dan Slessor*



BURLY THRASH: It seems like pretty much every country has a thrash scene, and leading the charge out of Israel is Hammercult, who storms back with their third full-length in four years. Opening with a rousing cinematic instrumental opener, the band wants the listener to know that what they are in for is big, and the chunky lesson in metallic bludgeon that follows backs up this statement. While they boast a winning hardness and "hammer" is a very appropriate word for inclusion in their name, they are catchy enough to really hold the attention, and these guys are mean. "Rise of the Hammer" sets the scene—it's pure new school thrash boasting equal parts thick grooves and breakneck aggro—and unleashes the first volley of killer shredding that always livens things up. With "Spoils of War," they pitch the rampant violence of the verses against a massive Fear Factory-esque chorus, some gang shouts thrown in for good measure, and

the anthemic "Ready to Roll" provides strong fist in the air motivation, too. The likes of "Raise Some Hell" and "Blood and Fire" are clearly built to inspire mosh-mageddon, and those exposed to it would be rude to resist. Certainly, there is nothing new on *Built for War*, but there doesn't need to be, when what you have are great songs played by great musicians. ~ *Dan Slessor*

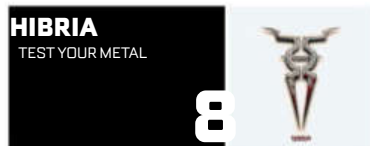


EXPLOSIVE BAY AREA THRASH METAL: Revitalized and refreshed, Hatchet is back with their third full-length album for thrash metal fans around the world. *Fear Beyond Lunacy* is explosive in terms of musicianship and production, and modern thrash fans will rejoice upon first listen, while old school fans will appreciate the Bay Area thrash worship within every second of the record. Julz Ramos provides his ever familiar vocal style that further differentiates Hatchet from other thrash bands. While iconic, they tend to feel a bit monotonous at times, but the energy stays consistent, especially when matched against Ramos' and Clark Webb's monstrous riffage and epic solo work. These two elements are at the forefront of *Fear Beyond Lunacy*, with drums and bass hardening the sound to the fullest. Hatchet is intense and menacing, and even more so when the group decides to slow the pace and dig deeper into their riffs. "Killing Indulgence" is a perfect example of this, showing that the band is eager to work in different directions while still keeping to their trademark style. Sometimes the songs meld together, resulting in a lack of replayability on a few occasions, but this isn't a deal breaker by any means, as *Fear Beyond Lunacy* still slays most of the competition with ease. ~ *Jeffrey Allee*



AMBIENT PIANO: Over recent years, Temporary Residence Ltd has proven itself one of the finest labels operating, in any genre, releasing only stirring records from unique and original artists. The latest from Hauschka (aka Volker Bertelmann) maintains this trend, piano being the primary instrument, and there is something so very organic about his works, his minimalist use of other sounds always adding extra depth to the songs. Beautiful and poignant constantly come to mind across the five originals and two remixed tracks on *A N D O C Y*, starting with opener "Hashima Island," the overlaid sonic textures melancholic and graceful. However, a variety of tones weave through the record, often counterpointing said beauty with playfulness, as on the jazzy "Varosha," or conjuring a distinctly uneasy air, as on "El Hotel De Saito." His capacity for imbuing conflicting feelings

in the same moments is affecting, something strident and confident but simultaneously unsure, characterizing "North Brother Island." Devendra Banhart and labelmate Eluvium deconstruct "Agdam" and "Stromness," respectively, in doing so creating engaging reworkings that fit alongside the originals, the latter one of the most moving tracks here, slowly collapsing into abstractness while retaining the warmth at its core. Beautiful and poignant, really. ~ *Dan Slessor*



BRAZILIAN POWER METAL: Hibria set the bar high with its 2004 debut album, *Defying the Rules*. However, the Brazilians have forever been chasing the glory of that masterpiece with every subsequent release. On its self-titled, sixth full-length album, the band strikes a dynamic balance between said masterpiece and its decent follow-up, *The Skull Collectors*, while adding a little more seasoning. The 10 blistering tracks are loaded with insanely catchy choruses, a pounding rhythm section, consisting of Eduardo Baldo and Benhur Lima, face melting guitar solos, courtesy of Abel Camargo and Renato Osorio, and the splendid banshee wails from Iuri Sanson. "Pain" starts the proceedings off nicely and proves to be an explosive opener. The equally energized "Abyss" and "Tightrope" follow it. "Church" is a scorcher of a tune, while closer "Words" taunts the listener with menacing riffs and gang chants. Hibria might ruffle a few power metal purists' feathers by including a horn section on "Pain" and "Ashamed." It may seem unconventional, but it adds a different dynamic to the songs and it actually works. Introducing orchestration on "Life" also cements the band's more experimental bravery. *Hibria* will most likely solidify the band's status as one of the world's best high-octane power metal bands. ~ *Kelley Simms*



DOOM: Finland's Hooded Menace is all about the gloom and the doom and everything in the world being pretty fucking awful. Those with similar viewpoints are likely to very much align themselves with that ethos and find solace in their trudging odes to hopelessness on *Darkness Drips Forth*, and the band certainly knows how to lower the mood and sap the will to live. Kicking off with a funereal bell seems a little redundant in 2015, but then they're all about the old school, which is both their strength and weakness. There's no doubt that they do what they do damn well on *Darkness Drips Forth*, and the suffocating crawl of opener "Blood for the Burning Oath/Dungeons of the Disembodied" thunders away convincingly, and when they do put their foot on the gas, slightly, there's a nice stomp to it. Likewise, the coiling riffs, gruff grooves, and the throat (and lung) destroying vocals, which are drenched in bile so thick you can taste it, bring the right amount of weight to bear. At numerous points across *Darkness Drips Forth's* four tracks, it draws you all the way in, and giving into it has a certain pleasure. However, the whole thing feels so familiar it's hard to remain all the way engaged, and when the shortest song clocks in at 9:48, that's not a good thing. The diehard misanthropics will probably love it though. ~ *Dan Slessor*



HIPSTER SCI-FI STONER PROG: The gorgeous sci-fi cover art is the first thing to catch the eye with this fourth album from Horisont, a group indebted to the psychedelic and out there prog and heavy rock of the glorious 70s. *Odyssey* is the most ambitious outing yet from Horisont, who started out their creative life as a solid group in the growing neo-classic revival from Sweden. The band's earlier efforts had their moments, but struggled to maintain a memorable aesthetic, whereas *Odyssey* holds some lofty ambitions within its synthesized and soundtrack-esque take on the sci-fi concept album. Epic length songs, arranged movements, and a hefty analog production quality works in the album's favor, although there is a bit of smug winking at the camera from Horisont, which makes the whole thing sound a bit disingenuous. The specter of Blue Oyster Cult and midnight cinema kitsch looms high over *Odyssey* in a positive way, however, and Horisont does possess the muscular musical chops to pull things off. Axel Soderberg's weak and fey vocals are another story and tie back again into the irony factor that hampers the otherwise noble aims of *Odyssey*. Still, there's a bit to chew on here, although the album's success will likely depend on how well one can balance good music with bad vocals. ~ *George Pacheco*



NEW OLD METAL: Huntress isn't trying to teach an old genre new tricks. The California thrash and traditional metal band is, however, crafting good (and sometimes great) guitar driven heavy metal with soaring vocals. The songwriting on the band's third album, *Static*, is a bit more patient than its predecessors. The thrashed Black Sabbath riffs are still front and center, but Huntress offers more organic pivots into solos or more progressive tangents than the stop-go approach that reigned on previous outings. Vocalist Jill Janus continues to carve space for her amazing vocal range, albeit in a much more mature—restrained—way than the infamous Huntress debut, *Spell Eater*. Incidentally, this may be a minority opinion, but Janus' hyperbolic, cartoonish delivery on *Spell Eater* was fantastic—more of that, please. On first listen, the best songs on *Static* are front loaded, but Huntress pulls a trick from classic metal and puts "Mania," an epic, eight and a half minute ballad, in the middle of the album, at the end of what would be side A of a record. Taken as its own set of songs, the rise and fall of the second half of *Static* is a grower. It appears Huntress has finally hit its stride. *Static* is easily the band's best material to date. There's nothing new here, but that doesn't mean that it's not good. ~ *Nick DeMarino*



EPIC INDUSTRIAL: InAeona is a curious beast. With an embrace of rich, synth-laden cinematic industrial sounds, atmospheric post-rock, and an ear for a stirring melody, the Bostonians don't quite fit in anywhere, which is no bad thing at all. Masters at layering up textured

GENTLEMENS PISTOLS

Hustler's Row

NUCLEAR BLAST

8

CLASSIC ROCK BOMBAST: The addition of former Carcass guitarist Bill Steer to the ranks of Gentlemen's Pistols back in 2009 was the best possible move for this British act, whose musical influences—similar to Steer's own—are steeped in classic rock riffage and grandiose, pomp bombast. Think of it as a straight-faced version of *The Darkness*, complete with a liltingly high vocal courtesy of former Voorhees frontman James Atkinson, whose guitar skills are thankfully more enjoyable to the ear. Of course, no one is going to outshine Steer in the six-string department, and the notably soulful guitarist has pulled out plenty of tasty licks from his bag of treats here on the band's third album, *Hustler's Row*. Steer's 60s and 70s rock influences—everything from Hendrix and Clapton to Pentagram and Black Sabbath—are laid clear on the table, while there is also a sparkling bit of glitter left over from the UK's classic glam rock scene of Marc Bolan and T-Rex, for good measure. *Hustler's Row* picks up some major steam as it goes along, as each song seems to have more energy and funk-filled heaviness than the last, collecting what may be the band's strongest collection of songs to date. There are riffs here for days, so stoner rock and classic rock fans are well advised to check this one out. ~George Pacheco



walls of sound, they are definitely hard to ignore, even if at times they are less engaging than at their best. Though opener "Bright Black" makes an impression, it's second track "Leader" that really kicks things off, a pulsating beat and a monstrous, somewhat mutated groove thundering over the listener, the truly titanic chorus irresistible. While there is anger on many of the tracks, the prevailing emotion is one of sorrow, which is particularly haunting on "Sun Moon" and closer "Skywatcher." Across the record, almost every time they unleash an instrumental break, which typically proceeds the climax, they take everything to a whole new level, in fact skipping many levels to attain the heights they reach. Their capacity for creating these dense soundscapes that uniformly soar above everything surrounding them is almost frustrating in that you want them to just keep doing exactly that, but they have the savvy to recognize the importance of dynamics, and that makes for a mostly absorbing, occasionally overwhelming collection. ~Dan Slessor

KILLING JOKE

Pylon

SPINEFARM

8



INDUSTRIAL POST-PUNK: Killing Joke may be heavy rock's foremost heralds of the apocalypse. Over the course of their 37-year career, they've gone from chronicling the very personal dooms of the working class to forecasting the imminent destruction of humanity through spacefaring asteroids and earthbound conspiracies. *Pylon* is their 16th album and third since the original lineup reformed in 2009. It sounds like they've settled comfortably into a groove with each other. Continuing along the same lines of *MMXII*, their roiling mix of industrial and post-punk feels like the natural place for them to have arrived at after years of experimentation. Jaz Coleman's mix of deadpan vocals and street preacher ranting remain as engaging as ever as he shouts about various new world orders. "Autonomous Zone" starts with sinister synthesizer pulses that build into a surging bit of electro punk, and there's even a slap bass for added flavor. The following track, "Dawn of the Hive," brings in more IDM/darkwave elements, while "Euphoria" has a more atmospheric vibe. There's a nice mix of styles throughout, keeping things from getting repetitive. While this may not be the most essential Killing Joke album, it proves that they haven't lost a single step after so many decades. It's nice to know the fire still burns. ~Jeff Treppel

KISKA

SPARTAN

7



ALTERNATIVE: Did 90s radio play help moody alternative rock bands? As far as sales and exposure go, sure, but it may have reduced their nuanced long plays to stray singles. And that was a shame. Philly natives Kiska (formerly Desoto Jones) is a throwback to that time when, over the course of an album, a band sets a scene that lends the big songs more wonder and majesty. You could pick any arbitrary song on Kiska's self-titled debut released by Spartan Records and discuss it as a single versus an evolution in and out of the songs that precede and follow it. A not so arbitrary example is "Deceiver," a mid album, midtempo song sandwiched between the ballad "Liberation Day (Fool's Gold)" and the upbeat "The Late Ungreat." On its own, "Deceiver" is a fine song.

After the emotive "Liberation Day (Fool's Gold)," though, it's a breath of fresh air that lightens the mood, but also keeps the melancholic color of the album taut so that "The Late Ungreat" can release that tension with triumphant riffs and swagger. Ultimately, Kiska's debut album is about a mood, and most of its songs benefit from proper context. That helps Kiska, but it also makes the band a slow grower, which may not be best for a first release. Thankfully, the album is good enough to sink your teeth into over a few listens. ~Nick DeMarino



KOWLOON WALLED CITY

Grievances

NEUROT

9



HEAVY AWESOME: Get into Kowloon Walled City. If ever you were to read something and do exactly what you're told, it's now. This band has been making mauling, sarcastic, scathing music for years now, and finally they are getting the wider platform they deserve with Neurot Records. Need background? Sit down with *Gambling on the Richter Scale* and report back. That's your new homework assignment, but we also want to pay attention to their awesome new record *Grievances* that is bashing and fierce. It's even tough to classify their style. They describe their sound as "short hair," which is very true, but they also have elements of post-hardcore, noise, punk, metal, you name it. Soft rock? Okay, you can't name everything. The band's music is pounding and in-your-face, and Scott Evans' vocals feel like they're always poking you forcefully in the chest, making jest at your ridiculousness and trying to take control. There is a ton of good stuff on this record, starting with "Your Best Years" and going through to the killer title track (one of the best songs in their canon), the smothering "Backlit," the mauling "White Walls," and the mucky, stabbing "True Believer." You need Kowloon Walled City in your life, and you can be the smart person who gets their brilliance simply by giving them real money for this great record. ~Brian Krasman

LEAVES' EYES

King of Kings

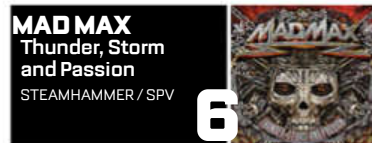
AFM

9



UNEXPECTED EXCELLENCE: Ambition is an important thing for a metal band seeking a lasting legacy, and Leaves' Eyes is nothing if not ambitious. Having expanded over the past decade-plus to embody a potent cocktail of gothic, symphonic, folk, and even death metal, these pan-European cohorts seem ever thirstier to impress with each release. Album six, *King of Kings*, is a concept album, something to which the band's usual historical themes are well suited, so its structure and pacing are sound, graceful, and unhurried. Its subject is King Harald Fairhair, first monarch of Norway, homeland of vocalist Liv Kristine (ex-Theatre of Tragedy). King of Kings' diverse highlights

include energetic Nightwish-esque anthems ("Halvdan the Black"), swift and infectious gothic marches in the Lacuna Coil vein ("The Waking Eye"), folkish tunes with the swagger of Turisas ("Vengeance Venom," "Swords in Rock"), and a rousing, cinematic epic ("Blazing Waters"). Kristine's husband Alexander Krull, leader of German death metal veterans Atrocity, supplies the beastly co-growls more powerfully than ever, and Victor Smolski's (ex-Rage) Whiterussian Symphony Orchestra brings King of Kings' sound to Mount Everest-like heights. This album is a real winner, far above average for its genre. ~ **Mike Smith**



PARTY METAL: Germany's Mad Max formed in 1981 and recorded four albums before splitting up in 1989, reuniting 10 years later. Since the reboot, the band has created some new and decent releases. Mad Max's 12th full-length, *Thunder, Storm and Passion*, is a best of album with all re-recorded tracks from their previous albums *Rollin' Thunder* (1984), *Stormchild* (1985), and *Night of Passion* (1987). The band's penchant for 80s NWOBHM is enhanced with the remakes, but sound much more processed. Although Michael Voss' vocals have lost a bit of its edginess, they are as flavorful and distinctive as ever. Opening track "Fly Fly Away" has lost its original swagger and sounds too polished. Power pop ballad "Losing You" is a bit predictable, but highly infectious with similarities to Stryper. "Rollin' Thunder" seems to benefit from a beefier production, while ballad "Thoughts of a Dying Man" doesn't create a lasting impact, especially when they drag it out to almost six minutes. More Scorpions influences show up on "Never Say Never," while "Stormchild" has a Western desert vibe. Usually when a band does a best of album, it's because of a record label contract commitment. *Thunder, Storm and Passion* is too safe, and there's not an overwhelming need to purchase it if you already own the originals. ~ **Kelley Simms**



CINEMATIC PROG: Maserati's bio compares them to a "supergroup comprised of Gary Numan, Cluster, and Pink Floyd," and throw some Tangerine Dream in there and you've got a dead on description. Their lush use of electronics brings so much life and character to every song, but would be nothing without the driving rhythms, chunky bass, and howling guitars that snarl and roar across the record. Opening with the longest song "No Cave," they rock the proverbial shit out of it, locking into insistent grooves and pushing and pushing, creating a vast, rousing, and steadily evolving soundscape that should have soundtracked a chase scene in a 70s movie. Elsewhere they are no less electrifying, the John Carpenter-esque "Montes Jura" having a damn nice throb to it, pulsating in a comparatively understated manner and focusing more on atmosphere than energy, while "End of Man" demands you shake your ass. Climaxing with a massive rock out, they give little breathing room before slamming into "Rehumanizer I," again kicking things into high gear, finding a killer groove, and staying in it before the midsection hits and begins to gloriously tear itself apart. "Rehumanizer II" brings things to a suitably

thrilling close, and one listen can never be enough, drawing you back in again and again. ~ **Dan Slessor**



REHEATED METALCORE: If you caught Memphis May Fire's *Unconditional* the first time around in March of 2014, then you already know that the album is their best yet. Between the endlessly impressive vocal stylings of Matty Mullins and the downright hypnotic drumming of Jake Garland, each track is listenable 10 times over. The trouble with evaluating a re-release, however, is that none of that has changed in just over a year's time. The 11 original tracks of *Unconditional* are remastered, but it's not quite enough of a noticeable change to warrant rushing out and grabbing the *Deluxe Edition* as soon as it hits shelves. On the other hand, brand new song "My Generation" is instantly a disc highlight, featuring choruses as infectious as ever paired with some relentlessly brutal growling. On "Stay the Course," the album's other new offering, the combination of a synth opening and soaring choruses make the track a surefire staple of live sets. If this were the first time the world had heard of *Unconditional*, then these two new songs, plus acoustic versions of "Beneath the Skin" and "Need to Be," would rocket the album into best of the year territory. But the fact that these four tracks are really all that's new, amazing as they are, relegates this *Deluxe Edition* to a for fans only release. ~ **Tyler Davidson**



ATMOSPHERIC SYNTH: Steve Moore is best known as one half of the magnificent Zombi, though he has dropped a string of fantastic solo releases in recent years, as well as providing the score for 2014's *The Guest*. *Cub*, a Belgian horror film, is perhaps unlikely to be seen by a large audience in the States, but if it's half as good as the soundtrack, it will make for essential viewing. Bringing his trademark layered analog synth sounds, Moore has created a score that is ethereal, haunting, and at times straight-up unnerving, often through very minimalist means. "Intro and Credits" is a wonderful slice of somewhat edgy atmosphere, steadily growing in intensity, and the manner in which Moore manipulates the listener is really quite peerless. "Casselroque" is implicitly menacing while remaining understated, while the brief and simple "Arrival" is quite glorious in its way. Elements of Phillip Glass creep into "The Treehouse," which is both eerie and gorgeous, and the increasingly foreboding unease of "The Truck" gets right under the skin. "The Hunt," which clocks in at over 11 minutes, is both the longest and most minimal track here, much of its length devoted to low, rumbling drones, only its climax piling in, and it does so crushingly. Fans of this oeuvre need this record. ~ **Dan Slessor**



RAP METAL: Rap metal is still an act punishable by death in many circles, conjuring up images



PAUL WERKMEISTER

DVD & BLU-RAY BLACK YO)))GA

BLACK YO)))GA
Asanas Ritual, Vol. 1
SCREAMING CROW



YOGA OF DOOM: Yoga might not seem the most metal activity on the surface, but those thinking that are way wrong. There are a number of metal musicians that devoutly practice yoga, and really, some of this music seems ideally created for reaching inside oneself, stretching one's limits, and getting spiritually aligned. Kimee Massie, a 200 hour, RYT certified yoga instructor, along with her musician husband Scott (of the totally badass Storm King) and friend Chad Hammitt have been helping Pittsburghers take on a totally different, darker environment. In fact, for years now, you could see fliers for their Black Yo)))ga hanging in record shops and on storefronts throughout the city for those looking for yoga of a different, doomier color. If this sounds right up your morbid alley, are you ever in luck. The Massies have put together *Asanas Ritual, Vol. 1*, an instructional DVD about their Black Yo)))ga, along with a soundtrack created by members of bands as varied as Storm King, Hero Destroyed, Agnes Wired for Sound, Complete Failure, Moonstation Burning, and a number of others to share their concept with the world. The music should be applied to the workouts, and it features sounds that should stimulate the mind and muscles of those who dine on drone, doom, and stoner metal. The DVD gives you a nice step-by-step, and the music is ideal for branching out and touching spirits a little darker than your own. It's a great way to get in touch with your metallic side while letting go of the negative energies. One of the best concepts of all time. ~ **Brian Krasman**

IRON SAVIOR
Live at the Final Frontier
AFM



CLASSIC POWER METAL: Although they have never been as high-profile as bands like Helloween or DragonForce, Iron Savior has consistently produced album after album of quality power metal since their inception back in 1997. Amazingly, this is the band's first live release, and it is nice that they went all-out, including a DVD and two CDs of the band's 2015 performance in Hamburg. Although the venue is a small club, it is packed with rabid metal fans, and the band does an excellent job of involving the crowd throughout (see the sing-along in "Break the Curse" for proof). Piet Sielck doesn't have the most versatile or wide-ranging voice, but he makes up for that with power and a distinctive personality, delivering a stellar performance from start to finish. In fact, the whole band sounds incredibly tight, whether they are playing speedy numbers like "Last Hero" or pounding anthems like "Heavy Metal Never Dies." While some bands get too far off into the progressive or symphonic sides of power metal, Iron Savior plays it straight down the middle, much like fellow Germans Primal Fear and Grave Digger. The only disappointing elements of the DVD are the rather uninspired camera work and lack of English subtitles for the German stage raps. Still, *Live at the Final Frontier* captures an excellent band at the top of their game, delivering career spanning material with a sense of fun and energy that is infectious. ~ **Daniel Hinds**



ADRIANA IRIS BOATRIGHT

KYLEESA Exhausting Fire SEASON OF MIST

8



PSYCHEDELIC SLUDGE: Now in their 14th year, Kyleesa has come a long way by playing by nobody's rules but their own, and their seventh full-length is another fine addition to their impressive canon. While they continue to forge into more melodic territory, this is still very much the trademark Kyleesa sound, with vocalist/guitarist Laura Pleasants taking the lion's share of vocal duties, which always brings a compellingly dreamy air to proceedings. With plenty of gruff and chunky riffs—which often come off as disarmingly simplistic, but in reality are anything but—the record is dominated by throbbing grooves, all of which are both weighty and catchy. That which drives opener “Crusher” is a perfect example, playing off against the extended trippy passages in sublime fashion, once again proving that they are one of the few bands that can still do the quiet/loud thing without it sounding hackneyed or forced. Elsewhere, they come close to sounding like Torche or even Weezer on a big bag of downers on “Moving Day,” while “Shaping the Sky” has a straight-up 70s glam rock stomp to it, as well as another absorbing psychedelic midsection. The second half of the record is perhaps less immediate, but yields great rewards with time invested, and further proves them true masters of their domain. ~ Dan Slessor

of a far less desirable time back in the late 90s/early aughts. That said, Neurotic November's second album, *Fighting Words*, works far better than it should, but it's actually the rap portions that fare better than the record's metal side. While “The Truth About You” drifts just a step too far into Hybrid Theory era Linkin Park territory for comfort, other tracks like “So Hollow” display some impressive flows from frontman Dirty, made all the more impressive by the fact that he alone provides both raps and death tinged growls on the album. While combining hip-hop and metal isn't really something anybody was asking for more of in 2015, there is something fascinating about the juxtaposition—the swagger of contemporary rap placed side by side with the us versus the world mentality of metal and hardcore. The metal segments of the 11 tracks waste no time in blending together and droning on (especially on penultimate track “Wasabi Anguish Pt. II”), interrupted only by ironically refreshing rap verses. It's certainly possible that *Fighting Words* might have made a much better EP, but for a second outing, the Floridians could do much worse, especially in such a maligned subgenre. ~ Tyler Davidson

Costello's natural grit and growl. Every track feels like an anthem for its various topics and empowering themes. Costello brings lightning to every track, proving that not only does she belong among the greats, but can easily stand incomparable to any other front person. This is never more evident than on scorches such as “Suffer” and “Your Ghost.” “Anthem of the Unwanted” reinforces an attitude and message we've come to expect from this genre, but few have the guts and talent to back it up like New Years Day. “Scream” is raunchy and seductive, while “Defame Me” puts forth Costello's ability to be vulnerable in one breath and slap the listener across the face in the very next. The title track is the band's best offering to date, crescendoing the summit of a truly excellent record. *Malevolence* should be the record that takes New Years Day from strong tour support to reliable headliner mainstays. ~ William James

drumming legend Mike Portnoy), vocalist/keyboardist Thomas Cuce, guitarist Ryland Holland, and bassist Kris Rank. On its debut full-length release, *A Light in the Dark*, it's easy to tell that these youngsters grew up listening to a lot of Dream Theater. Portnoy Sr. produced the album, and although it might seem like nepotism, it's seriously doubtful he actually forced InsideOut to sign his kid's band. There's plenty of talent on display here, unfortunately, the songwriting still sounds like it was written by a bunch of teens. The epic, nine plus minute opener, “The Edge of Sanity,” has all the requirements for a modern prog metal song, while the aggressive follow-up, “You Are Not Me,” complete with growls, is a nice contrast. However, ballads “A Lonely Walk” and “Legacy” sink into an all too familiar Dream Theater pattern, right down to Cuce's obvious James LaBrie influence. “Control” is a vibrant tune, but its disjointed rhythms and abrupt tempo changes sound out of place. The rest of the tracks also have a Dream Theater formula, and by that point, it all sounds too predictable. *A Light in the Dark* is admirable, but Next to None needs a little seasoning. Hopefully, they can find their own identity on its next release. ~ Kelley Simms

keeps it palatable within genre confines. The instrumentals are tight on *Mutiny at Muscle Beach*, which helps given the aggressive edge and pace of the music, though it might be more fun if the band sounded a little more unhinged and out of control. If you're wondering if Night Birds sounds like the Dead Kennedys or Circle Jerk, then sure, they do. And so do a lot of other bands. Unlike a lot of other bands that sound like the Dead Kennedys or Circle Jerk, however, Night Birds has songs, like “Life Is Not Amusement for Me,” “In the Red/In the Black,” and “Golden Age of TV,” that are memorable in their own right. Even at their most stylistically self-indulgent—see the Dick Dale inspired, Cthulhu related closer, “Miskatonic Stomp”—they're still entertaining. *Mutiny at Muscle Beach* might not change your mind about the genre, but it will give you hope that Night Birds can bridge the gap between decades of punk rock fans. ~ Nick DeMarino



9

NOT YOUR TYPICAL GOTH ROCK: *Malevolence* is a storm of declarations, pouring buckets of confidence and swagger, as New Years Day bucks the clichés that follow female fronted acts by ripping through fist pumping riffs from start to finish. “Kill or Be Killed” is a shotgun blast opener, igniting the roaring fire that follows. Even on the band's most pop flavored offerings, there is no hiding Ashley



NEXT TO NONE A Light in the Dark INSIDEOUT

6

PROG METAL PRODIGIES: Next to None features 15-year-old drummer Max Portnoy (son of

NIGHT BIRDS Mutiny at Muscle Beach FAT WRECK CHORDS

8



HARD SURF PUNK: You don't have to be into 80s hardcore to enjoy the Night Birds, but...oh, actually you probably do. New Jersey's Night Birds does one thing, and they do it quite well on *Mutiny at Muscle Beach*. For a couple dozen minutes, the quartet unleashes blast after blast of raw, surf punk washed glory. There's melody to be sure, but the snotty delivery

OCEANS OF SLUMBER Blue CENTURY MEDIA

6



PROG MEANDERINGS: Houston's Oceans of Slumber is back. Sort of. While 2013's *Aetherial* unleashed a deluge of Mastodon thunder, the 2015 edition of the band, which features new vocalist Cammie Gilbert, is a far more introspective and restrained beast with an almost jazzy flair. Granted, that four of the six songs on *Blue* are covers, one is a brief reworked version of an older track, and only one new song makes an appearance perhaps makes it premature to think you really know what the band is now capable of. Still, new song “Turpentin (Reprise)” paints a very delicate picture, essentially just a frailty picked melody, and Gilbert's voice has quite a soporific effect,

which depending on your perspective could be a good or bad thing. The previously epic “Memoriam” appears in a similarly low-key reinterpretation and a fraction of the original’s length, though it is the covers that make the biggest impression. They show their doomy side on Candlemass’ “Solitude,” Emperor’s instrumental “The Wanderer” is doubled in length and is pretty good, and Pink Floyd’s “On the Turning Away” is suffused with potent warmth. Their most ambitious undertaking is Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir,” which will very much induce a love or hate response, mutating that riff in interesting ways and making for something curiously absorbing. ~ **Dan Slessor**



SCREECHING DEATH: From the first few seconds of *The Final Cull*, the sophomore effort by One Machine, it’s apparent that what’s in store is nine tracks of a thrash tinged assault that doesn’t let up. Frontman Chris Hawkins’ vocals touch on inspiration from the highest order of metal royalty, with signs of everything from Phil Anselmo (“Forewarning,” “Born from This Hate”) to Rob Halford (“Ashes in the Sky”). To the surprise of no one, Steve Smyth (of Testament and Nevermore legend, among others) turns in absolutely mind-bending solos on songs like “Summoning of the Soul” and especially “New Motive Power.” While the technical skill is present in spades (especially from studio drummer Michi Sanna), the album does reach a point of being beaten about the head with varying degrees of metal, from sludge to doom to thrash. Especially considering seven minute epics like “The Grand Design” and the album’s title track, even a single listen can be a bit exhausting. This isn’t a bad thing, it just puts the record in a different class. In this respect, parallels can be drawn to film. While some scenes are infinitely rewatchable, One Machine’s *The Final Cull* is more along the lines of a movie like *Requiem for a Dream*—dark, heavy, and insanely good, yet after the first experience, something to take a break from for a while. ~ **Tyler Davidson**

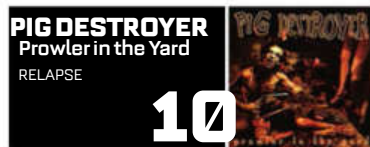


MODERNCORE: With a heap of post-hardcore, a dollop of pop punk, and a pinch of electronica, Japan’s rock all-stars One Ok Rock makes their US debut with *35xxxv*. Truth be told, *35xxxv* is actually One Ok Rock’s seventh album, and this is one of those deluxe edition redux deals. If you’re not already familiar with the band, the names of the attached producer (John Feldmann) and guest vocalists (Tyler Carter and Kellin Quinn) are pretty good signposts for what’s here on *35xxxv*. If you’re familiar with J-Rock in general, well, aside from nationality,

this doesn’t have very much to do with that, though a couple of songs are tied to a well known manga/anime/film franchise. A quick perusal of One Ok Rock’s back catalog reveals this wasn’t always the case, but that they’ve long harbored post-hardcore sentiments. The funny thing is that it’s the straight ballads—“Heartache,” “Good Goodbye,” “Fight the Night,” and “Last Dance”—that not only break up the monotony, but give *35xxxv* some heart and lasting impact. Takahiro Morita’s vocals are good and often great, and the instrument performances are tight, if a little understated. One Ok Rock’s *35xxxv* is great for post-hardcore and pop punk fans looking to expand their horizons. If you’re on the prowl for new J-Rock, though, look elsewhere. ~ **Nick DeMarino**



VINTAGE VOLUME: The long, winding, and rocky road that has defined Pentagram’s journey from early 70s underground curiosity to 21st century doom metal icons just got longer with the return to Peaceville and release of *Curious Volume*. That the album comes only four years since the release of highly regarded album *Last Rites* is indicative of mercurial frontman Bobby Liebling’s degree of stability in both musical and personal terms and guitarist Victor Griffin’s steady hand. The result is an album’s worth of stout songwriting and unapologetic familiarity that fans will adore. The riffs are enormous, the leads are tube amped and fuzzy, and Liebling’s vocals are confident and just left of sane. Devoid of fat and filler, *Curious Volume* offers a consistent selection of blues based uptempo rockers and midpaced dirges that is pure, vintage 70s in sound and style. Whether the blues ‘n’ boogie of “The Tempter Push,” the crackling hard rock of “Earth Flight,” the proto-punk of “Misunderstood,” or the catchy, sublime groove of “Close the Casket,” *Curious Volume* is the genuine Pentagram article. Though sounding just fine in MP3 terms, everything about *Curious Volume* begs to be experienced on the 180g vinyl LP version, further explanation needed only for newcomers to the Pentagram fold. ~ **Scott Alisaglu**



GRINDCORE REISSUE: When Pig Destroyer dropped *Prowler in the Yard* in 2001, it was like setting a bomb off in the grindcore community. Though they would go on to make their defining statement with 2004’s *Terrifyer*, 14 years later the record is still an absolute beast, and this reissue, which boasts a fine remix that adds new depth and grit to the original, should draw a legion of unwitting fans into their hideous fold. While the Stephen Hawking computer voice spoken word monologue of “Jennifer” that opens it veers a little too much toward the comical, the same cannot be said for anything that follows. “Cheerleader Corpses” is as visceral as it gets, immediately wiping the aforementioned from your memory, the likes of “Scatology Homework,” “Intimate Slavery” and “Tickets to the Car Crash” every bit as devastating. When they’re not attempting to remove your face, they’re making you extremely uncomfortable. The stop-start weirdness of “Body Scout” excels at this, as does the droning horror of “Hyperviolet,” and the slow, sludgy battering of “Starbelly” is suffocating in the best

possible way. The only addition for hardcore fans is “Unreleased Untitled Track,” which is a breakneck instrumental, and is a welcome if nonessential inclusion and doesn’t detract from anything that precedes it. ~ **Dan Slessor**



CREEPY SYNTH ROCK: Like their name implies, Pinkish Black is a weird combination, a muddy mixture of bright and dark that becomes more engrossing the longer you stare into it. The duo has grown over the course of their first two releases, playing around and experimenting, really dialing in their fusion of synthesizer prog and post-punk, all filtered through a metal sensibility. Their third album, *Bottom of the Morning*, finds the right frequency. The result sounds like a strangely seamless mashup of Italian horror prog pioneers Goblin, stoner doom pranksters Melvins, and electro punkers Suicide. From the magisterial opener “Brown Rainbow,” which starts things off right with a keyboard driven zombie attack, all the way through the moody, feedback drenched closer “The Master Is Away,” the record scratches itches you didn’t even know you had. There’s a striking dynamic between the clean keyboard swooshing and the fuzz enveloping everything else. It makes *Bottom of the Morning* feel unlike anything else out there. It’s a remarkably assured work, with an aesthetic consistency stringing all the bent hooks and dissonance together. The whole thing exudes a creepy, deliberate atmosphere. It’s hard to imagine how they’ll top this opus, but now that they’ve locked into this sound, it’s hard to imagine they won’t. ~ **Jeff Treppel**



STEAMPUNK METAL: The name Pyogenesis may not ring any bells to any metal fan under the age of 30, but for the older guard, this German outfit created some of the most unique and amazing death/doom back in the early 90s, before relegating themselves to a head scratching career of pop punk and indie rock records. *A Century in the Curse of Time* represents neither of those polar extremes, but it does lend further credence to Pyogenesis as an act that refuses to compromise in their quest to write any sort of music they please. The album is a steampunk inspired concept record about the industrial revolution that—although not quite returning to the roots of their *Ignis Creatio* debut or iconic *Twineblood* record—showcases a heavier Pyogenesis than fans have heard in many years, hearkening back to the genre mashing weirdness of 1994’s *Sweet X-Rated Nothings* with its mix of heavy riffing, melodic leads, and Beatles-esque vocal harmonies from frontman and songwriter Flo

V. Schwarz. The album isn’t immediate and takes a few listens to fully sink in, but it’s a one of a kind effort from a unique band. Pyogenesis has always been fearless in their desire to compose daring and challenging records, with *A Century in the Curse of Time* serving as their most successful outing in well over 20 years. ~ **George Pacheco**



PROGRESSIVE METAL: Queensrÿche is one band that has never stopped progressing since its 1982 inception. No need in wasting too much time rehashing the debacle that split the core band and Geoff Tate into two camps. However, the Tate-less Queensrÿche, featuring Michael Wilton (guitar), Parker Lundgren (guitar), Todd La Torre (vocals), Scott Rockenfield (drums), and Eddie Jackson (bass), has forged ahead and looks to be the better of the two. Now on its second album with the current lineup, *Condition Human*, the band has crafted 12 moody and dynamic songs in the vein of its early era roots. La Torre sounds so similar to former vocalist Tate that the uninitiated might think it’s still Tate singing. Lead track “Arrow of Time” begins perfectly with those classic harmonized leads and a bouncy rhythm section. “Guardian” also possesses an early to mid period Queensrÿche sound. “Hellfire” furthers the early era vibe, consisting of gang chant samples similar to “Revolution Calling.” “Toxic Remedy” also contains familiar melodic guitar progressions and soaring vocal harmonies. However, the album is back-loaded with a few too many ballads and slower tempo songs. If you liked the direction the band took on their 2013 self-titled album, then *Condition Human* will most likely satisfy as well. ~ **Kelley Simms**



CHUNKY CROSSOVER: Contrary to the adage suggesting you can never have too much of good thing, the potential downside of *No Epitaphs* is that the 11 tracks bursting from within its seams are all much of a muchness. Stylistic left turns, or even slight nudges in said direction, are not on the program, the quintet intent on exposing their thrashy hardcore, headbanging their way into early onset arthritis, and given how damn compulsive their racket is, there are sure to be many swept up in the tide. Setting aside the overfamiliarity, there is a lot to love about this booze soaked blast of adrenaline. The heads down stormer “No Forgiveness in Death” aptly communicates where they’re coming from—maniac riffing, rampant drums, twin solo leads, and roared refrains that lodge firmly in the brain are all unleashed, and it’s easy to get caught up in the gleeful frenzy of it all. Other standouts include

SHINING
International Blackjazz Society
SPINEFARM



BLACKJAZZ: Since 2005's *In the Kingdom of Kitsch You Will Be a Monster*, Norwegian blackjazz anomaly Shining (not to be confused with the Swedish black metal vets of the same name) has attempted to redefine all preconceived notions of normalcy within the expansive genre of extreme music by pushing the boundaries of metal, jazz, pop, and prog beyond the point of recognition. Dubbing this unique sound blackjazz, Shining blends the free jazz stylings of John Coltrane with the aggression of modern metal acts like Slipknot. Where the band's 2007 release, *Blackjazz*, took things to the apex of extreme metal, *International Blackjazz Society* revisits the industrial rock nuances heard when Shining first began to hybridize jazz with metal. The result is polished yet chaotic, tuneful yet tumultuous, and blissfully unpredictable. Picture Marilyn Manson taking part in an improvisational nu metal jam session with saxophonist and revisionist John Zorn after binging on gutter punk records, and you might scratch the surface of *International Blackjazz Society*. Compared to Shining's last few albums, *International Blackjazz Society* offers more structure and pop sensibility, which smoothes out some of the band's rough edges. While this album is no less intense than others, it does come across as more focused and accessible. ~ Ryan Dgle



ALEXANDER BENJAMINSEN

the brief and demented fury of "The Life We Choose," unleashing blastbeats and all kinds of chaos, the meaner than mean "Walls," which recalls The Hope Conspiracy in a belligerent mood, and the equal parts catchy and killer "Super Duty," with its badass riffs and riotous shout-along passages. *No Epitaphs* is definitely a decent record to start a bar fight to, for those so inclined. ~ Dan Slessor

REFLECTIONS
The Color Clear
GOOD FIGHT / EONE



MELODIC EXPERIMENTAL METALCORE: *The Color Clear* will immediately speak to those that enjoy concept albums or works that contain nearly seamless pacing and transitions. Reflections returns with their third record that mixes together a plethora of influences and sounds that accomplishes such a task. The band takes elements of deathcore, metalcore, and djent, with a darkened atmosphere coating the entire concoction. Combine this with the pacing, and you've got yourself one of the finest metalcore albums of the year. "Pseudo" starts the album out with a well executed atmosphere, submerging the listener into a sea of painful personal experiences and uplifting revelations. *The Color Clear* describes the perspective of Jake Wolfe, who has undergone devastating events and does an incredible job of translating this with the power and emotion of his vocals. Patrick Somoulay brings an elegant persona to the group, with crisp compositions and soaring solos, while Francis Xayana and Nick Lona provide a solid, energetic rhythmic backbone. As *The Color Clear* progresses, Reflections becomes more chaotic and aggressive, as if they are sending the listener into an abyss filled with loss, confusion, and suffering. Reflections expertly shows that you shouldn't judge a band by its genre.

~ Jeffrey Allee



RITUAL
BULLET TOOTH



DEADER AND DIVINER: Vocalist Matt Tobin's new band Ritual makes its debut with a thoroughly satisfying self-titled album. The Canadian quintet plays jarring, heady hardcore and proto metalcore. Think old school Botch with a smidgeon of classic Vision of Disorder, right down to the sprinkling of crooning, melodic clean vocals. In fact, the biggest difference between Ritual and Tobin's former band, Dead and Divine, is that he's no longer groping falsetto vocals. And that's why Ritual will probably prove to be the better band. There is some window dressing in the form of a few audio clips from vintage educational films, but *Ritual* is largely a straightforward gut punch. The fleeting use of melody—"Pisces," "Gag Order," "Rat Queen," and "Model Wife" are prime examples—retains the momentum of

the harsher, angular guitar attacks. Melody, in this context, is no safe haven. Well, except maybe on "White Blooded," which is the only song that could outright pass for a Dead and Divine track. You could make the case that "Ripe" falls into that camp, too, though the dynamics are decidedly more varied. It's as if *Ritual* is photosensitive, cowering from the light but inexorably drawn to it. They don't wallow in melancholy, though. They're fucking pissed, and you should be thankful for that.

~ Nick DeMarino

RITUALKILLER
Extermination
SEASON OF MIST



DEATHENED BLACK METAL: It's been 10 years since Ritual Killer last dropped a full-length. Yep, a decade has passed since the New Orleans black metal crew, whose ranks count members of Goatwhore, Acid Bath, and Crowbar, put out *Upon the Threshold of Hell*, during which time the US black metal scene has exploded, and not entirely in a good way, making their return one to a cluttered playing field. *Extermination* packs eight tracks into a little under 28 minutes, and they don't waste time on trifles such as nuance and subtlety when rampant blastbeats, buzz saw riffing, and tortured vocals more than convey their bleak and violent worldview. Balancing rawness with weight, their mix packs a decent amount of punch without overly sanitizing matters, ensuring that every track is as unpleasant as the one that precedes it. "Bury the Earth, Bury the Sky" unleashes hell, vocalist Jordan Barlow sounding like he's being fed into some horrifying mechanism as he snarls and wails, and things don't lighten up at any point. The punky squall of "Feral Eyes" drips with as much snot as blood, and getting in and out in under two minutes, it doesn't overstay its welcome, while the icy thrash of "Cuntius" and "Crippling Beast" are equal parts agony and tragedy. A timely, obnoxious, and most welcome return. ~ Dan Slessor

RUBIKON
Delta
ROUND HILL



BLUES ROCK: Boston blues rockers Rubikon is poised to have a breakout year with the release of its third full-length album, *Delta*. Combining modern rock, classic rock, Southern rock, stoner rock, and blues, Rubikon is almost uncategorizable. The band rattles off nine fabulous tracks with an obvious nod toward acts such as Led Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd, ZZ Top, Foo Fighters, and Queens of the Stone Age. Jae's raspy vocals are superb, while the rest of the band shines in their respective departments. The immediate impact of lead track "Live That Lie" is reinforced with twangy riffs delivered with a Southern rock drawl. It only gets better from there, as the ZZ Top boogie-woogie groove of "Three Days" follows. The funkified "Captain Deep" strikes a familiar chord, complete with booming Bonham-like bass drum patterns. The bluesy shuffle, vibrant keyboard melodies, and sweetly sung vocals of "Through the Looking Glass" recalls classic 70s acts such as Steely Dan and The Alan Parsons Project. The Foo Fighters meets Queens of the Stone Age vibe of supersonic closer "Pretty Pretty" brings the album full circle. There are also standout moments featuring harmonica, banjo, slide guitar, and church organ. *Delta* is one of the most complete albums through and through, boasting an earthy and warm production. ~ Kelley Simms

SACRILEGE

Behind the Realms of Madness

RELAPSE

9

CROSSOVER THRASH: Not every great band carves out a legacy that fans remember for decades. You could argue UK crossover thrashers Sacrilege falls into the category where time hasn't been terribly kind to them, despite leaving the world with three scathing full-length records. Relapse, being quick to bring this band's greatness into larger awareness, is re-releasing the band's debut *Behind the Realms of Madness* and, holy shit, if this record doesn't sound fresh and alive even 30 years later. Not only is their debut back in circulation—it goes way beyond the original six track release, as it's expanded to 13 with seven previously unreleased bonus cuts—but their politically charged, fully impassioned style reminds us just how in-your-face and raw this style of music can be. Sacrilege is also worthy of being on the tips of everyone's tongues when the roots of crossover are discussed, and this refreshed release with new album art should help that. The music is bruising and infectiously fiery, and Lynda "Tam" Simpson's vocals absolutely command on tracks including "Lifeline," "At Death's Door," "The Closing Irony," and unreleased cuts "Flight of the Nazgul" and "Feed." This record is a history book you'll have tons of fun studying to get up to speed on where this music came from.

~ Brian Krasman

SAXON

Battering Ram

UDR

9

BRITISH STEEL: Some of the diehards will cling to nostalgia, pointing to 1980's *Wheels of Steel* or 1981's *Denim and Leather* as Saxon's irrefutable gold standard. But such narrowness of focus threatens to overlook a strong body of work that, for the most part, has only gotten better, right up to and including 2013's *Sacrifice*. *Battering Ram* does nothing to derail the winning streak and may be the fiercest of Saxon's 21st century output. A blistering album, the opening title track will make fans of present-day Judas Priest weep with envy. The song sets the tone for one of the meanest sounding albums of the band's career, due to Andy Sneap's ear piercing production. The track opens the floodgates for an adrenaline rush of twin guitar firepower and fist pumping metal that includes the slayer "The Devils Footprint," the *Alice in Wonderland* themed "Queen of Hearts," the molten purity of "Destroyer," and the anything but subtle "Hard and Fast." The album's one stylistic exception is the beautifully composed, melancholic World War I tale "Kingdom of the Cross," featuring narration from Hell's David Bower. *Battering Ram* gets right to the heavy metal heart of Biff Byford's warrior clan, keeping the voltage high right on through closing scorcher "Three Sheets to the Wind." Let no doubt remain, this is British steel. ~ Scott Alisaglu

SEVENDUST

Kill the Flaw

7 BROS / ADA

6

METAL RADIO ROCK: *Kill the Flaw* starts with a haunting whisper and then quite a bang. Following an electronica tinged piano, "Thank You" front-loads a machine gun volley of sharp chugging, along with smooth guitar melodies, harsh multi-tiered backing growls, and a finely

crafted chorus from lead vocalist Lajon Witherspoon. It's a powerful bulldozer in the vein of Sevendust classics "Denial" and "Crucified" and a promising album opener. Sadly, it's mostly downhill from here, and whatever high hopes "Thank You" inspired are waterlogged if not dashed against the rocks. Rather than continue their creative hot streak after the return of guitarist Clint Lowery—*Cold Day Memory* (2010) and *Black Out the Sun* (2013) were both excellent career highs—the Atlanta quintet seems to have settled for an uninspired rehash of the commercial *Seasons* (2003) and the dull *Chapter VII* (2008). Witherspoon's soulful croon worked wonders on breakthrough release *Animosity* (2001), but more often than not since then has been overused to the point of abuse, drowning the band's instrumental talent, which *Kill the Flaw* admittedly retains. Sevendust is stuck in an unsatisfying dead spot between metal and radio rock, and only closer "Torchred" fully recalls the heady, crude excitement found on *Sevendust* (1997) and *Home* (1999).

~ Mike Smith

SLAYER

Repentless

NUCLEAR BLAST

7

THRASH: That there's a new Slayer album at all is either a miracle or a travesty, depending on how you look at it. After the untimely death of founding guitarist Jeff Hannemann and the unceremonious dismissal of legendary drummer Dave Lombardo, it was definitely a question as to whether the thrash metal gods would ever record again. The show must go on, however, and so we have *Repentless*. With Exodus main man (and touring guitarist for several years) Gary Holt taking Hannemann's place and Paul Bostaph on the stool once more, remaining members Kerry King and Tom Araya have certainly found talented substitutes. Hannemann's songwriting wizardry proves a more elusive thing to replace, however. These mostly midpaced songs certainly sound like Slayer, but there's a ham-handedness to them. They feel more like something you'd hear at a dumb energy drink festival than in the pits of hell. That said, Slayer is still Slayer. It's hard not to kick drum along or air guitar to the riffs on "Chasing Death" or "You Against You," and "When the Stillness Comes" proves they can still do creeping evil with the best of them. In the end, their 11th studio album is still satisfying, even if it lacks the inimitable chemistry of the lineup that recorded classics like *Reign in Blood* and *South of Heaven*. ~ Jeff Treppel



SO HIDEOUS

Laurestine

PROSTHETIC

10

DRONE: Retaining its place at the head of the most ironically named band set, So Hideous has delivered one of the most sublime and

KYLESA

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NO CLEAN SINGING



BEHOLD... THE ARCTURION

Behold... Total Rejection

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RITUAL KILLER

Extermination

RITUAL KILLER, feat. current and ex mems of Goatwhore, captures the true essence of black metal fury and 'Extermination' explodes like a blast from hell's furnace.



HATE ETERNAL

Infernus

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STEREOGUM



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Success

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Season of Mist



BLACK TRIP Shadowline

STEAMHAMMER / SPV

8



OLD SCHOOL METAL: Sweden's Black Trip has pure heavy metal running through its veins. Paying homage to the classic metal sound while remaining fresh and modern is what Black Trip does best. The 11 energetic and vibrant tracks on its sophomore release, *Shadowline*, are gloriously soaked in the NWOBHM influences of Iron Maiden, Saxon, Thin Lizzy, and Def Leppard. There's a distinctive flavor to Black Trip, most notably due to the harmonized guitar leads from Peter Stjärnvind and Sebastian Ramstedt and the charismatic vocals of singer Joseph Tholl. Lead track "Die with Me" is a raucous affair, combining said influences with a punky, glam rock vibe. "Danger" continues the Thin Lizzy motif, while the title track delivers a punk attitude with modern rock elements. However, "Berlin Model 32" is a high-octane affair that best embodies all of Black Trip's influences. Early era Scorpions creeps into "Subvisual Sleep," while Iron Maiden-isms permeate "Sceneries." The brooding escalation of "The Storm" segues into closer "Coming Home"—a midpaced rocker with a great guitar tone and buildup, ending the album in fine fashion. Black Trip is one of many bands playing this style of metal, but they show a lot of promise, and their material will only get stronger on their next album. ~ Kelley Simms

beautiful collections of 2015. Yes, vocalist/bassist Christopher Cruz unleashes almighty screams across the record, and the double kick that underpins passages of certain songs has a real ferocity to it, but the layers and layers of shimmering noise that dominate are anything but ugly. The tragic piano that kicks off opener "Yesteryear" throbs with emotion, and from there the song constantly evolves, building into dramatic crescendos, at times bringing everything crashing down but always involving. Imagine the end credits of a 60s French indie film and from there extrapolate to the extremes of Explosions in the Sky or Deafheaven, and you get some idea of the sounds contained by *Laurestine*, but it is impossible to do the record justice with comparisons and words. The juxtapositions at the heart of "Relinquish" make it particularly engaging, while "Falling Cedars" is almost impossibly gorgeous, its earlier passages aching with so much grace it can be hard to listen to. The surging strains of "The True Pierce" and Envy-esque closer "A Faint Whisper" once again push things toward the heavens, wrapping up a record that really is in a class of its own. ~ Dan Slessor

SPEAKING THE KING'S Carousel

NUCLEAR BLAST

6



POST-HARDCORE CROSSOVER: If it weren't for the immediacy of Bobby Burap's vocals, Orange County, California's Speaking the King's would be a tough pill to swallow. Their brand of hard rock spirited post-hardcore is faded enough to be old, but not old enough to be retro. Still, there is a handful of songs on their debut album, *Carousel*, that shimmer among the countless songs clogging the genre. The occasional splash of dual guitar is

welcome, though the trade off is sitting through some truly regrettable breakdowns. Speaking the King's grinds through part after part, rarely lingering or exploring. At the start, that's an asset, but as the band works through the latter half of *Carousel*, it becomes glaringly obvious that nothing is going to challenge you. Moreover, the crossover material is front-loaded and the latter album songs are slavishly by the books. Speaking the King's' biggest asset on *Carousel* is Burap's middle of the register, middle of the road vocals. If someone—a 19-year-old boy singing falsetto, for example—were at the mic, it would be easy to pigeonhole Speaking the King's as scene and herd. But, with soaring choruses that approach Nickelback territory, the band casts a wider, barfly friendly net. *Carousel* offers a bit of a jerky ride, but it's not a bad start. ~ Nick DeMarino

SPOCK'S BEARD The Oblivion Particle

INSIDEOUT

8



PRODIGAL PROG: A dozen albums into the fray, you know what to expect from virtuoso Alan Morse and company. *The Oblivion Particle*—seriously, is there a better topic for prog rock than the Higgs boson?—offers complex, dynamic songwriting, dramatic melodies with backing harmonies and whimsical orchestration, lithe and often in sync guitar and keyboard workouts, as well as clockwork, occasionally angular rhythm section support. After making a memorable mark with his first appearance on *Brief Nocturnes* and *Dreamless Sleep*, vocalist Ted Leonard comes into his own on *The Oblivion Particle*, sounding more relaxed and better blended into the band's sound. With only one song under six minutes, every segment of *The Oblivion Particle* functions

independently as its own world within a world. "Minion" and "Hell's Not Enough" play heavily on the band's retro flair and occasional classical leanings—facets that are sure to draw more comparisons to Gentle Giant. Other standouts include the near ballad "Bennet Built a Time Machine" and the near power metal romp "The Center Line," both of which show versatility in an already versatile band. *The Oblivion Particle* presents Spock's Beard at a new zenith and begs the question of whether it's fair to keep asking them for another album like *The Light*. ~ Nick DeMarino

STAHLMANN CO2

AFM

6



NEUE DEUTSCHE HARTE: Göttingen, Germany's Stahlmann plays a subgenre referred to as Neue Deutsche Härte (New German Hardness). Supposedly, the term alludes to Neue Deutsche Welle (German New Wave) and was coined by the music press after the release of Rammstein's 1995 debut, *Herzeleid*. Neue Deutsche Härte is basically glossy, industrial rock done in that efficient Teutonic way. You could just listen to Rammstein, or if you want to expand your breadth of options the same way Stahlmann, Eisbrecher, Weissglut, and others are—taking stabs at the outside world after Rammstein demonstrated you don't have to sell out the motherland to be international rock stars—give *CO2* a shot. The conclusion is an audience exists that is looking for additions to their post-Nine Inch Nails/Marilyn Manson/rock bar/dance club rotation. There's little variation between what Stahlmann and Rammstein does, as its sound is limited to massive power chords, sweeping keyboards, militaristic rhythms, and someone possibly named Stahlmann dressed

up in outrageous garb—the band is best known for painting themselves silver for live shows—throttling you with an inhumanly deep baritone. All the ingredients are here, and it's immaculately constructed, but falls on the wrong side of the excitement scale.

~ Kevin Stewart-Panka

STRATOVARIUS Eternal

EARMUSIC

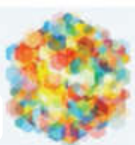
8



MELODIC POWER METAL PIONEERS: For a band that has existed for over 30 years (and has zero original members currently in the lineup), Finland's Stratovarius has maintained a remarkably consistent output, both in terms of quality and style. They have perfected grandiose, symphonic power metal, layering soaring vocals over incredibly complex guitar and keyboard interplay. "My Eternal Dream" and "Rise Above It" will please fans of *Infinite* and *Polaris*, with the band's propulsive mix of melody and speed fully intact. Not content with just treading the same ground over again, there are also tracks that explore new territory. "Lost Without a Trace" has a Sentenced melancholy if you strip away the gloss, while the technofied "Man in the Mirror" is the logical successor to the more modern tunes on *Nemesis*. "Fire in Your Eyes" is a piano led ballad not quite like any of their previous ballads, and "The Lost Saga" is the requisite 12 minute epic that caps off the album majestically. Finding the right balance that allows for creative progression while staying true to previous albums is never easy for a band, but Stratovarius appears to have the secret formula. *Eternal* is not as daring or memorable as their last couple records, but it is a strong release nonetheless and stands proudly on its own. ~ Daniel Hinds

TESSERACT
Polaris
KSCOPE / EONE

10



AMBITIOUS PROGRESSIVE METAL: With great power, comes great responsibility. This is especially true for British progressive metal band Tesseract and their third studio album. *Polaris* is also the name of the brightest star in the constellation Ursa Minor, and this perfectly describes the sound and feel of the album, with it easily transcending many other modern progressive metal outfits. Dan Tompkins returns to the forefront with a renewed vigor and emotion in his vocal duties. The band utilizes this to the max, carefully layering his voice within the music in such a way that you undoubtedly feel it as an instrument. The guitars by Aclé Kahney and James Monteith play a vital role as well, with light melodies strewn throughout and contrasted alongside heavy hitting grooves that shape and mold the flow of the music. Add in Amos Williams' beautifully crafted bass pulsing every which way and it continuously evolves the group efforts into a living creature. Jay Postones' drumming completes the formula, with a loosely styled technique that somehow pulls everything together without making it sound manufactured and cold. Tesseract keeps impressing with every release, going with different ideas and compositions while still keeping their identity. *Polaris* proves why Tesseract remains at the top of the progressive metal scene. ~Jeffrey Allee

UGLY KID JOE
Uglier Than They
Used to Be
UKJ / METALVILLE

8



NOSTALGIC GARAGE ROCK: When *Uglier Than They Used to Be* was recently released, it was one week shy of 19 years since the third and seemingly last Ugly Kid Joe album. And it might not have come to pass if fans didn't fork over the cash via PledgeMusic. Like many reunion/crowdfunded affairs, *Uglier Than They Used to Be* leans heavily on the band's glory days. Fortunately, Ugly Kid Joe's glory days were quite good. Vocalist Whitefield Crane's somber croons and misfit anthems are perfectly matched to the band's hard rockin', mildly moody riffs. The three guitar mix makes for a thick sound plus occasionally braided riffs and guitar solos. It's heavier than you'd expect and better, too. Of course, there are two covers—"Ace of Spades" and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone," the former of which includes Motörhead guitarist Phil Campbell. They're fun enough. Ugly Kid Joe may never regain the commercial (and, ahem, financial) success that their debut *America's Least Wanted* brought them, but they don't seem to care. They're having fun on *Uglier Than They Used to Be* and it shows. To borrow lyrics from the album opener, "Let the Record Play," "Don't even try to reminisce / Never were a hit / We are a terrible miss / Don't you rewind to yesterday / Put the needle down and let the record play." ~Nick DeMarino

UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS
The Night Creeper
RISE ABOVE

8



OCCULT ROCK: If there's one thing Uncle Acid & the Deadbeats excels at, it's creating an all encompassing atmosphere. The whole Satanic hippie shtick they have going would feel pretty disingenuous if it wasn't for the band's uncanny ability to send you back to the summer of Charles Manson in a haze of purple smoke and the flickering of an old film projector. On *The Night Creeper*, their fourth album, they continue their exploration of psychedelic rock as filtered through a broken amplifier. Like former labelmates Electric Wizard, the immersive fuzz helps give them their unique vibe. However, instead of using Black Sabbath as their starting point, they use the later work of The Beatles. "Melody Lane" and "Inside" could be Beatles covers. Of course, The Beatles

TSJUDER
Antiliv
SEASON OF MIST

8



BLACK METAL: There must have been a time when you've purchased a record, put it on, listened to a song or three, and realized that the album in question sounds exactly the way you hoped it would. Those pining for old school, demonic black metal might have that very experience with Tsjuder's smothering new record *Antiliv*, their fifth effort and first since 2011's killer *Legion Helvete*. These Norwegian cultists keep things the way they were intended, as in blistering, unforgiving, fearsome, and intense every step of the way. In fact, this band has been kicking souls and bodies for the past two decades-plus, coming in at the tail end of the second wave and remaining one of the most deadly, consistent bands in the genre. They've not lost an ounce of their vitriol over the years, and the eight cuts that comprise *Antiliv* go for the throat and refuse to let go until the blood is streaming through their teeth. This eight track, 46 minute collection begins righteously and viciously with "Kaos," and from there, the grim, devastating terror maintains a deadly clip through "Krater," "Norge," the possessed "Demonic Supremacy," and the filthy "Slumber with the Worm." It's no accident that Tsjuder is one of black metal's most revered names, and the gargantuan *Antiliv* will jar awake anyone unaware. ~Brian Krasman

TWITCHING TONGUES
Disharmony
METAL BLADE

9



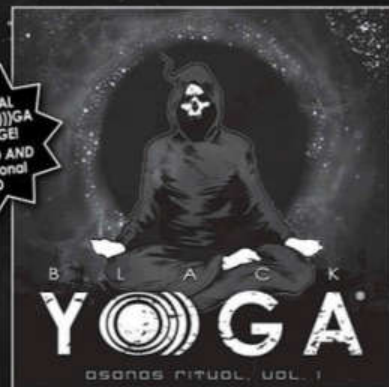
AVANT GARDE CORE: *Disharmony*, the third release from Twitching Tongues, is one of the most creatively ambitious releases of the year, an exercise in metallic experimentation that is every bit as refreshing as it is punishing. The opening title track sets a grandiose tone,

something that wouldn't be out of place on the soundtrack of a bloody Argento film, before dropping listeners into a hybrid of hardcore thrash and churning doom metal. Vocalist Colin Young grunts and growls with the prowess of a young Phil Anselmo, while brother Taylor Young's blistering licks are especially notable on tracks like "Insatiable Sin." "Arrival" tempers the album with a softer edge, though, as Colin's vocals soar against a backdrop of synthesizers and piano keys. The solos on "The End of Love" kick things back into overdrive before the massive album closer "Cruci-Fiction," a draining (albeit rewarding) listening experience in its own right. *Disharmony* touts aural influences from a broad spectrum, ranging from Pantera to King Diamond, from Type O Negative to even Depeche Mode. They haven't forgotten their hardcore roots, of course, but the fact that this won't stop them from venturing far outside their comfort zone should make their next outing hotly anticipated, and if *Disharmony* is any indication, vastly impressive. ~Tyler Davidson

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CATTLE DECAPITATION

The Anthropocene
Extinction
METAL BLADE

9



DEATH GRIND: Looking back over Cattle Decapitation's catalog, there really is no low point, having always been so damn good at what they do, and with their recent releases they have somehow been getting better and better. *The Anthropocene Extinction*, the follow-up to 2012's stunning *Monolith of Inhumanity*, continues this tradition, and it is not only their most sonically devastating record but also their most engaging and most chilling. Kicking things off with the sky is falling thunder of "Manufactured Extinct," they blast, squall, and roar through an explosion of brutality that—also in keeping with its recent predecessors—manages to be catchy despite its extremity. You won't hear it on the radio any time soon, but it gets under the skin in the best possible way, and they repeat this across the record. "Not Suitable for Life" and "Circo Inhumanitas" are as scathing as the band has ever been, which certainly challenges their genre mates to keep up. Of course, with Cattle Decapitation, the music really is only half of the picture. The concept woven together by vocalist Travis Ryan—who employs more of his black metal-esque melodic shriek across *The Anthropocene Extinction*—takes listeners on a horrifying journey into a very real future, and makes it abundantly clear that all is soon coming to an end. ~ Dan Slessor

ZACH CORNWELL

never sounded this filthy. Or this dark and creepy. That melodic sensibility helps tie the whole album together. *The Night Creeper* feels more cohesive than its predecessor, *Mind Control*, where the band seemed to be casting about for a direction. The songs flow nicely into each other, helping bolster the atmospheric excellence. In some ways, that makes it a less interesting album, since they largely avoid gonzo experimentation. The increased focus on the songs more than makes up for it. It feels like they've settled into their sound. ~ Jeff Treppel

sections to full force riff barrages. The album's epic title track, with a blazing sequence of layered leads that builds to a frenzied pitch, is one hell of a forceful statement, and a definitive reminder that W.A.S.P. is back and out for blood. ~ George Pacheco

a similar snarl, Dorrian's previous outfit was never this brute in their approach. It's primitive without feeling lazy, derivative without sounding played out. Despite definite similarities to previous acts, the trio proves to be its own beast. Besides the great songs to be found, that may be the most impressive achievement. They've succeeded in creating something that plays to their strengths and interests, in the same genre as their more famous previous acts, and giving it its own unique spin. Cathedral and (the original incarnation of) Electric Wizard are dead, long live With the Dead. ~ Jeff Treppel

you might confuse XO Stereo with a K-pop band. Still, somehow, the song carries the day. *The Struggle* reveals enough cards for interest in a full-length follow-up, but it's far too unfocused to function as a cohesive release in itself. ~ Nick DeMarino



9

STANDING TALL, RUNNING WILD: The venerable Sunset Strip shock rock act has returned after a six year hiatus with their 15th full-length album. *Golgotha* sees guitarist/vocalist Blackie Lawless and crew in rebirth mode, blazing a trail of energy and fire with the band's strongest and most cohesive collection of songs in years. There's a wealth of riffs and musical ideas that might sound familiar to those that have followed W.A.S.P. since their early 80s debut, yet it's the execution that really pushes *Golgotha* to the forefront of the band's recent output. Fans that grew up with W.A.S.P. album landmarks as *Inside the Electric Circus*, *The Headless Children*, *The Crimson Idol*, or the self-titled debut from 1984 should most definitely reconnect with the band in 2015, for standout *Golgotha* tracks "Scream," "Miss You," and "Slaves of the New World Order" stand tall alongside any of the band's exemplary early work. This is in part due to the cohesion with which Lawless and his bandmates work, crafting songs that often undergo varied and successful movements, from excellent melodic



WITH THE DEAD

RISE ABOVE

8

DOOM METAL: If you were expecting to be surprised by a project featuring Cathedral's Lee Dorrian and the rhythm section from Electric Wizard, then surprise...you won't be. If, however, you are expecting awesome old school doom metal, you've come to the right place. Even though Dorrian joined guitarist/bassist Tim Bagshaw and drummer Mark Greening later in the process, With the Dead feels closer to Cathedral than Electric Wizard on their self-titled debut. Instead of the drug fueled haze of the latter, songs like "The Cross" have a real malevolence to them, like an army of the undead rising from ancient church yards. Bagshaw and Greening swing like the witches hammer, and even though Dorrian goes for

XO STEREO

The Struggle
CENTURY MEDIA

7



POP PUNK POST-HARDCORE: With one foot firmly rooted in the rock anthem post-hardcore camp and the other in the pop punk, radio ready side, Los Angeles' XO Stereo sounds a tad too familiar. There's not a bad song on their debut EP, *The Struggle*—every song is a potential single—but it's predictable "we're just a rock band you can't label us" core. There are plenty of whoas, and the members of XO Stereo have the chops to pull it off better than most, though, which makes sense since some of the ringers on board were in LoveHateHero and From First to Last. "Show and Tell" is the clear standout of *The Struggle*, though the title track merits deeper discussion. When your production gets so thick that you sound like a different band, it's probably time to rethink your earlier material or drop the whatever shtick your attempting. Instead, XO Stereo named their debut EP after a song that has completely different aesthetics than its kin. The electro charged mix champions the keys above the guitars, and the vocals have so much Auto-Tune

ZOMBI

Shape Shift
RELAPSE

9



SYNTH PROG: Instrumental synth prog kings Zombi released the phenomenal *Escape Velocity* four long years ago. Since then, bassist/keyboardist Steve Moore and drummer AE Paterra have kept busy with various solo projects, collaborations, and film scores, but those just weren't the same as when the two combined forces. Thankfully, they have now blessed us with *Shape Shift*, and the wait was definitely worth it. The title is indicative of their direction. While their last album felt a little more 80s, with a rhythmic Jan Hammer influence, this one finds them returning to a more 70s sound, possibly influenced by Moore's touring stint with the legendary Goblin or even the release of John Carpenter's first non-soundtrack album earlier this year (both of whose horror movie scores paved the way for this entire genre). Whatever the inspiration, the duo has come up with a creepy, pulsing beast, one that reaffirms their mastery of the form. Whether it's the way "Interstellar Package" slowly washes over you, the urgent night drive of "Mission Creep," or the off-kilter metronomic build of "Diffraction Zone," Zombi keeps things engaging the entire way through *Shape Shift*. Despite the explosion of synthwave bands since this duo formed 14 years ago, they have proven that they are still the princes of darkness. ~ Jeff Treppel



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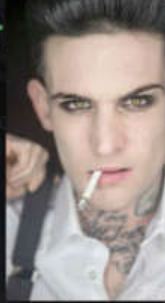
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